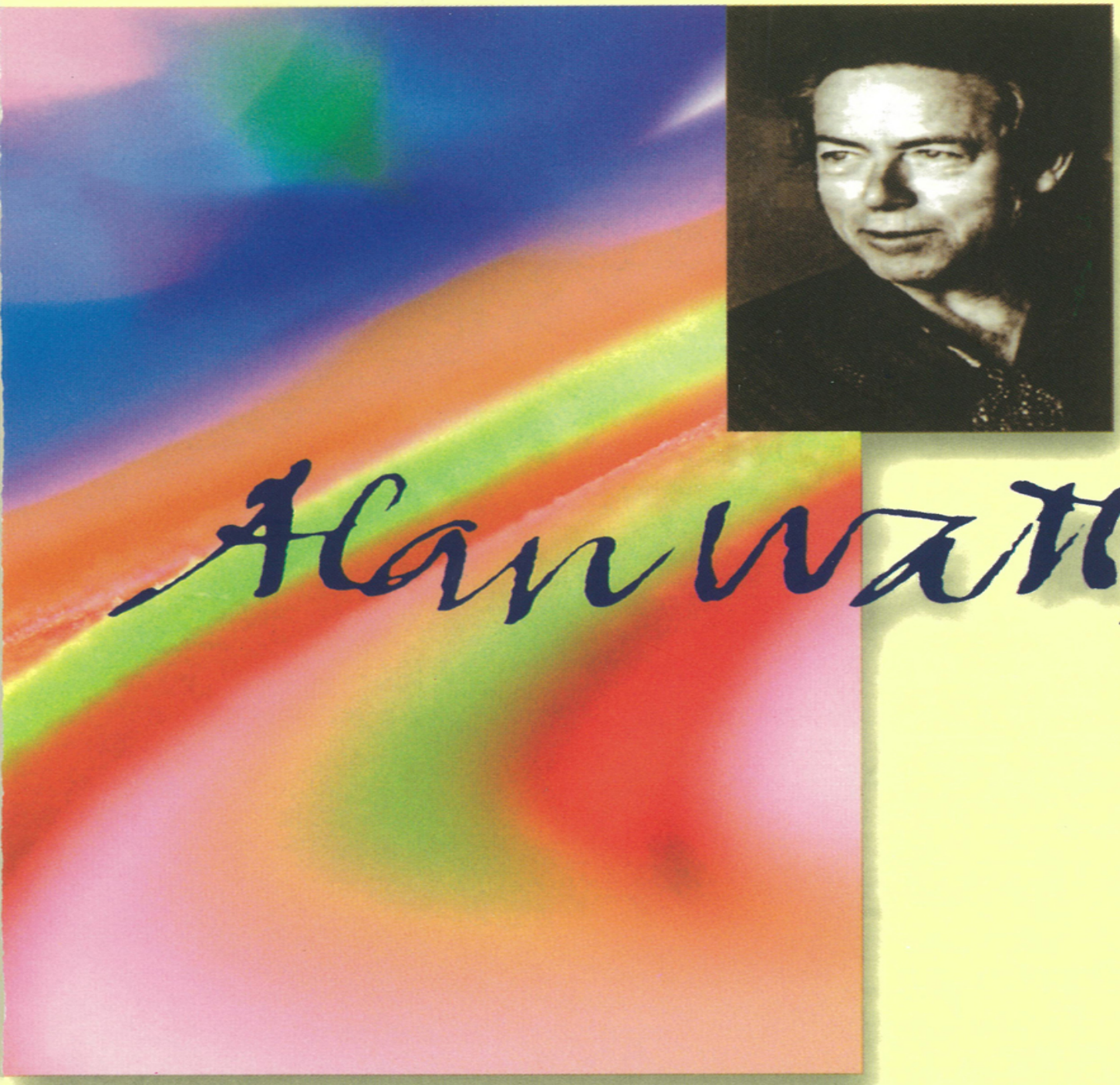
The Tao of Philosophy



Alan Watts

THE LOVE OF WISDOM LIBRARY

THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

ALAN WATTS
at a seminar aboard the *Vallejo,* 1966

THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

TUTTLE PUBLISHING
Tokyo • Rutland, Vermont • Singapore

First paperback edition published in 2002 by Tuttle Publishing, an imprint of Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd., with editorial offices at 364 Innovation Drive, North Clarendon, Vermont 05759.

Copyright © 1995 Mark Watts

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Watts, Alan, 1915-1973
The Tao of philosophy: the edited transcripts / Alan Watts.
96p., 23cm.—(Love of wisdom library)
1. Philosophy, Comparative. 2. East and West. 3. Philosophy.
I. Title. II. Series: Watts, Alan, 1915-1973. Alan Watts "Love of wisdom" library.
B799.W34 1995
191—dc20 95-22261
CIP

Photo courtesy of Alan Watts Electronic Educational Programs

ISBN-10: 0-8048-3204-8
ISBN-13: 978-0-8048-3204-5
ISBN: 978-1-4629-1673-3 (ebook)

Distributed by:

North America, Latin America & Europe
Tuttle Publishing

364 Innovation Drive
North Clarendon, VT 05759-9436
Tel: I (802) 773-8930
Fax: I (802) 773-6993
tuttle-sales@gol.com
www.tuttlepublishing.com

Asia Pacific
Berkeley Books Pte Ltd
61 Tai Seng Avenue #02-12
Singapore 534167
Tel: (65) 6280-1330
Fax: (65) 6280-6290
tuttle-sales@gol.com
www.periplus.com

Japan
Tuttle Publishing
Yaekari Building, 3rd Floor
5-4-12 Ōsaki, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo
Japan 141-0032
Tel: (81) 3 5437-0171
Fax: (81) 3 5437-0755
tuttle-sales@gol.com

10 09 08 07 10 9 8 7

Cover design by Jeannet Leenderste

Printed in Singapore

Tuttle Publishing® is a registered trademark of Tuttle Publishing, a division of Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd.

Dedicated to Al Chung-liang Huang

Contents

Introduction
Foreword: On Philosophical Synthesis
I. Myth of Myself
II. Man in Nature
III. Symbols and Meaning
IV. Limits of Language
V. Images of God
VI. Sense of Nonsense
VII. Coincidence of Opposites
VIII. Seeing Through the Net

Introduction

Welcome to *The Tao of Philosophy,* and to some remarkable ideas about the role of philosophical inquiry and the "true purpose" of living. These thoughts spring from a life-long study of Eastern philosophy by an inspired and articulate Westerner, Alan Watts. A prolific writer and speaker, Watts is well known for his numerous books on Christianity, Zen, Hinduism, and Taoism, including his classic *The Way of Zen.* Originally from England, Watts was the Chaplain at Northwestern University during the time of World War II. Following the publication of *Behold the Spirit* in 1947, Watts left the Church in 1950, and soon thereafter traveled to California to teach at the Academy for Asian Studies in San Francisco with Dr. Fredrick Spiegelberg.

Three years later Watts began the "Way Beyond the West" radio series on KPFA in Berkeley. His radio talks were so well received in the Bay Area that they continued on KPFA for thirty years. At various times the shows also aired on other Pacifica stations in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston on Sunday mornings, and became popularly known as "the hangover cure" in the late sixties and early seventies. During this period the *Los Angeles Times* reviewed his books and described Watts as "perhaps the foremost Western interpreter of Eastern thought." He spoke regularly at colleges, seminar centers, and progressive churches across the country. The Sunday radio programs were by that time recorded in the field instead of at the studios of KPFA, and his early radio style of presentation gave way to a dynamic speaking style that earned him a reputation as a modern philosopher/entertainer. Alan

Watts passed away in 1973 in the midst of writing a companion volume to *The Way of Zen* on Taoism.

Recently, when I began to select original live recordings to re-introduce radio audiences to my father's spoken works, many of his later talks with generally Taoist themes stood out as excellent examples of his mature philosophy. It was apparent that he felt comfortable with a view of the world which is "of itself so," and not the construct of a personified ultimate reality. The wisdom of working with the course and current of nature to solve the problems of ecological balance also appealed to his sensibilities, and he spoke of the "organism/environment" as "more nearly us than I."

The Tao of Philosophy is a literary adaptation of talks selected to introduce the new "Love of Wisdom" series to today's audiences. The following chapters provide rich examples of the way in which the philosophy of the Tao is as contemporary today as it was when it flourished in China thousands of years ago. Perhaps most significantly, these selections offer modern society a clearer understanding of what it will take for a successful reintegration of humans in nature.

We begin with a foreword written in July of 1953, entitled "On Philosophical Synthesis." The contrast between the style of this earlier article and the following chapters reveals the transformation Watts underwent as he moved from the academic environment, in which these questions were first raised, to the personal experience, in which they were resolved. For as his close friend, poet Elsa Gidlow, wrote of his growing into the spirit of the Tao:

> *... it transformed him as he allowed it to permeate his being, so that the reserved, somewhat uptight young Englishman, living overmuch in his head, in his mature years became an outgoing, spontaneously playful, joyous world sage. He believed that a widespread absorption of the profound wisdom of Taoism could similarly transform the West.*

—Mark Watts
1995, San Anselmo, California

Foreword

On Philosophical Synthesis

In many respects the formal, academic philosophy of the West has come to a dead end, having confined itself to a method of inquiry which compels it to move in a vicious circle. This is especially true in epistemology, which, because it involves the whole work of self-knowledge, is really the central problem of philosophy. As the West understands it, epistemology is really the task of trying to "think thought"—to construct words about words about words—since philosophical thinking is, for us, not a changing but a verbalization of experience.

The inquiring mind is perennially fascinated with the problem of the mind's own nature and origins—not only to know just by way of information *what* knowing is, but also to employ such information for the greater control of the knower, for is it not frequently said that *the* problem of modern man is to be able to control himself as effectively as he can control his environment?

But there is a basic contradiction in the attempt of reason to transcend itself. To know the knower, to control the controller, and to think thought implies a circular and impossible situation, like the effort to bite one's own teeth. It is for this reason that modern logical philosophy tends to dismiss such inquiries as "metaphysical and meaningless" and to confine philosophy to the investigation of relatively pedestrian problems of logic and ethics. This situation has arisen in the West because, for us, "to know" really means "to control"; that is, to see

how events may be fitted to consistent orders of words and symbols so that we may predict and govern their course. But this mania for control leads ultimately to a barren confusion, because we ourselves are by no means separated from the environment we are trying to control. Western man has been able to pursue this mania only so far because of his acute feeling of individual isolation, of the separation of his "I" from all else. Thus, in philosophy, in technology, and in the whole ordering of our society, we run into the ancient problem of *Quis custodiet custodies?* —who guards the guard, polices the policeman, plans the planner, and controls the controller? The logical end of all this is the totalitarian state of George Orwell's *1984,* the nightmare of mutual espionage.

On the other hand, such major Oriental philosophies as the Vedanta, Buddhism, and Taoism arise in cultures far less concerned with controlling the world, and in which the whole notion of the dominance of the universe by man (the conscious ego) seems palpably absurd. For all these philosophies it is a first principle that the seeming separateness of the ego from the world, so that it could be its own controller, is an illusion. Individual consciousness did not contrive itself and, not being *sui generis* (un-born, *anutpanna*), can never be the directive source of life.

Thus, for Oriental philosophy, knowledge is not control. It is rather the "sensation"—the vivid realization—that "I" am not this individualized consciousness alone, but the matrix from which it arises. This knowledge consists, not in a verbal proposition, but in a psychological change, similar to that which occurs in the cure of a psychosis. One in whom this change has come to pass does not attempt to control the world, or himself, by the efforts of his own will. He learns the art of "letting things happen," which is no mere passivity but, on the contrary, a creative technique familiar to the activity of many artists, musicians, and inventors in our own culture, whereby skill and insight are found to be the fruits of a certain "dynamic" relaxation.

It is obvious that a philosophy, a wisdom, which offers deliverance from the vicious circle of "controlling the controller" is of immense value

to cultures, like our own, which are hopelessly confused by their schemes to organize themselves. However, it will be extraordinarily difficult for a wisdom of this kind to come within the scope of Western philosophy unless the latter can admit that philosophy is more than logic, more than verbalization, to the point where philosophy can include the transformation of the very processes of the mind, and not simply of the words and symbols which the mind employs.

THE TAO OF PHILOSOPHY

THE EDITED TRANSCRIPTS

Myth of Myself

Chapter One

I believe that if we are honest with ourselves, the most fascinating problem in the world is "Who am I?" What do you mean and what do you feel when you say the word "I"? I do not think there can be a more fascinating preoccupation than that because it is so elusive and hidden. What you are in your inmost being escapes your examination in rather the same way that you can not look directly into your own eyes without using a mirror, and that is why there is always an element of profound mystery in the question of who we are. This problem has fascinated me for many years and so I have asked a number of people, "What do you mean by the word 'I'?" Now there is a certain agreement about this especially among people who live in Western civilization, and we have what I have called the conception of ourselves as a skin-encapsulated ego.

Most of us feel "I"—my ego, my self, my source of consciousness—to be a center of awareness and of a source of action that resides in the middle of a bag of skin. It is very funny how we use the word "I." In common speech, we are not accustomed to say, "I am a body." We rather say, "I have a body." We do not say, "I beat my heart" in the same way we say, "I walk, I think, I talk." We feel that our heart beats itself, and that has nothing very much to do with "I." In other words, we do not regard "I, myself" as identical with our whole physical organism. We regard it as something inside it, and most Western people locate their ego inside their heads. You are somewhere between your eyes and between your

ears, and the rest of you dangles from that point of reference. This is not so in other cultures. When a Chinese or Japanese person wants to locate the center of himself, he points to what Japanese call the *kokoro* and the Chinese call *shin,* the heart-mind. Some people also locate themselves in the solar plexus, but by and large we locate ourselves behind the eyes and somewhere between the ears. It is as if within the dome of the skull there was some sort of arrangement such as there is at SAC Air Force headquarters in Denver where men sit in great rooms surrounded with radar screens and all sorts of monitors, watching the movements of planes all over the world. So, in the same way, we have really the idea of ourselves as a little person inside our heads who has earphones on which bring messages from the ears, and who has a television set in front of him which brings messages from the eyes, and has all sorts of electrodes all over his body giving him signals from the hands, and so on. He has a panel in front of him with buttons and dials and things, and so he more or less controls the body. He is not the same as the body because "I" am in charge of what are called the voluntary actions, but what are called the involuntary actions of the body happen to me. I am pushed around by them, although to some extent also I can push my body around. This, I have concluded, is the ordinary, average conception of what is one's self.

Look at the way children, influenced by our cultural environment, ask questions. "Mommy, who would I have been if my father had been someone else?" The child gets the idea from our culture that the father and mother gave him a body into which he was popped at some moment; whether it was conception or parturition is a little bit vague, but there is in our whole way of thinking the idea that we are a soul, a spiritual essence of some kind, imprisoned inside a body. We look out upon a world that is foreign to us and, in the words of the poet A.E. Housman, perceive "I, a stranger and afraid, in a world I never made." Therefore we speak of confronting reality, facing the facts. We speak of coming into this world, and there is a sensation we are brought up with of being an island of consciousness locked up in a bag of skin. Outside us we face a world that is profoundly alien to us in the sense that what is

outside "me" is not me, and this sets up a fundamental sensation of hostility and estrangement between ourselves and the so-called external world. Therefore we go on to talk about the conquest of nature, the conquest of space, and view ourselves in a kind of battle array towards the whole world outside us. I shall have much more to say about that in the second chapter, but in the first I want to examine the strange feeling of being an isolated self.

Now actually it is absolutely absurd to say that we came into this world. We did not: we came out of it! What do you think you are? Suppose this world is a tree. Are you leaves on its branches or are you a bunch of birds from somewhere else that settled on a dead old tree? Surely everything that we know about living organisms—from the standpoint of the sciences—shows us that we grow out of this world, that each one of us is what you might call a symptom of the state of the universe as a whole. However, that is not part of our common sense.

Western man has, for many centuries, been under the influence of two great myths. When I use the word "myth" I do not necessarily mean a falsehood. The word myth signifies a great idea in terms of which man tries to make sense with the world; it may be an idea, or it may be an image. Now the first of two images which have most profoundly influenced Western man is the image of the world as an artifact, much like a jar made by a potter. Indeed, in the Book of Genesis there comes the idea that man was originally a clay figurine made out of the earth by the Lord God who then breathed into this clay figurine and gave it life. The whole of Western thought is profoundly influenced through and through by the idea that all things—all events, all people, all mountains, all stars, all flowers, all grasshoppers, all worms—are artifacts; they have been made. It is therefore natural for a Western child to say to its mother, "How was I made?" On the other hand, that would be quite an unnatural question for a Chinese child, because the Chinese do not think of nature as something that was made. Instead, they look upon it as something that grows, and the two processes are quite different. When you make something you put it together: you assemble parts, or you carve an image out of wood or stone, working from the outside to

the inside. However, when you watch something grow, it works in an entirely different way. It does not assemble its parts. It expands from within and gradually complicates itself, expanding outwards, like a bud blossoming or a seed turning into a plant.

Yet behind our whole thought process in the West is the idea that the world is an artifact and that it is put together by a celestial architect, carpenter, and artist, who therefore knows how it was done. When I was a little boy I asked many questions which my mother could not answer. She used to resort in desperation to saying, "My dear, there are some things that we are not meant to know," and I would say, "Well, will we ever find out?" And she would answer, "Yes, when we die and we go to Heaven it will all be made clear." So I used to think that on wet afternoons in Heaven we would all sit around the throne of grace and say to the Lord God, "Now, just why did you do it this way, and how did you manage at that?" and He would explain it and make it all very clear. All questions would be answered because, as we have in popular theology understood the Lord God, He is the mastermind who knows everything. If you ask the Lord God exactly how high is Mount Whitney to the nearest millimeter, He would know exactly, just like that, and would tell you. You could ask any question of God, because He is the cosmic *Encyclopedia Britannica*. However, this particular image, or myth, became too much for Western man because it is oppressive to feel that you are known through and through, and watched all the time by an infinitely just judge.

I have a friend who is a very enlightened Catholic convert, and in her bathroom she has an old-fashioned toilet, and on the pipe that connects the tank with the toilet seat there is a little framed picture of an eye. Underneath it, in Gothic letters, is written "Thou God seest me." Everywhere is this eye—watching, watching, watching—watching and judging you, so that you always feel you are never really by yourself. The old gentleman is observing you and writing notes in his black book, and the idea of this became too much for the West. We had to get rid of it, and so instead we developed another myth, the myth of the purely mechanical universe. This myth was invented at the end of the

eighteenth century, and became increasingly fashionable throughout the course of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, so that today it is common sense. Very few people today really believe in God in the old sense. They say they do, but although they really hope there is a God, they do not really have faith in God. They fervently wish that there was one, and feel that they ought to believe that there is, but the idea of the universe being ruled by that marvelous old gentleman is no longer plausible. It is not that anybody has disproved it, but it just somehow does not go with our knowledge of the vast infinitude of galaxies and of the immense light-year distances between them, and so on.

Instead, it has become fashionable, and it is nothing more than a fashion, to believe that the universe is dumb and stupid, and that intelligence, values, love, and fine feelings reside only within the bag of the human epidermis, and beyond that it is simply a kind of a chaotic, stupid interaction of blind forces. For example, courtesy of Dr. Freud, we have the idea that biological life is based on something called "libido," which was a very loaded word. This blind, ruthless, uncomprehending lust is seen as the foundation of the human unconscious, and to thinkers of the nineteenth century like Hegel, Darwin, and T.H. Huxley, there was similarly the notion that at the root of being is an energy, and this energy is blind. This energy is just energy, and it is utterly and totally stupid, and our intelligence is an unfortunate accident. By some weird freak of evolution we came to be these feeling and rational beings, at least more or less rational, but all this is a ghastly mistake because we are here in a universe that has nothing in common with us. It does not share our feelings, has no real interest in us, and we are just a sort of cosmic fluke. Therefore, the only hope for mankind is to beat this irrational universe into submission, to conquer it and master it. Of course all this is perfectly idiotic. If you think that the idea of the universe has been the creation of a benevolent old gentleman, you soon realize He is not so benevolent after all, and He takes an attitude of "this is going to hurt me more than it is going to hurt you." You can have that idea on the one hand, and if that becomes uncomfortable you can

exchange it for its opposite idea that the ultimate reality does not have any intelligence at all, and at least that would get rid of the old bogey in the sky in exchange for a picture of the world that is completely stupid.

Of course, these ideas do not really make any sense because you cannot get an intelligent organism, such as a human being, out of an unintelligent universe. You do not find an intelligent organism living in an unintelligent environment. Here is a tree in the garden, and every summer it produces apples; and we call it an apple tree because the tree "apples"—that is what it does. Here is a solar system inside a galaxy, and one of the peculiarities of this solar system is that, at least on the planet earth, it "peoples" in just the same way that an apple tree "apples." Now, maybe two million years ago, somebody came from another galaxy in a flying saucer and had a look at this solar system, and they looked it over and shrugged their shoulders and said, "Just a bunch of rocks," and they went away. Later on, two million years later, they came around again and they looked at it and they said, "Excuse me, we thought it was a bunch of rocks but it is peopling, and it is alive after all; it has done something intelligent." We grow out of this world in exactly the same way that the apples grow on the apple tree, and if evolution means anything, it means that. But curiously, we twist it. We say, "Well, first of all in the beginning there was nothing but gas and rock. Then intelligence happened to arise in it like a sort of fungus or slime on the top of the whole thing." However, we are thinking in a way that disconnects the intelligence from the rocks. Where there are rocks, watch out, because the rocks are going eventually to come alive and they are going to have people crawling over them. It is only a matter of time, just in the same way the acorn is eventually going to turn into the oak because it has the potentiality of that within it. Watch out, because rocks are not dead.

Now all of this depends on what kind of attitude you want to take to the world. If you want to put the world down, you might say, "Oh well, fundamentally it is only a lot of geology, sheer stupidity, and it just so happens that a kind of a freak comes up in it which we call consciousness." Now, that is an attitude that you may take when you want to prove to people that you are a tough guy, that you are realistic,

that you face facts, and that you do not indulge in wishful thinking. However, it is just a matter of role-playing, and you must be aware of these things; these are fashions in the intellectual world. On the other hand, if you feel warm-hearted towards the universe, you put it up, instead of putting it down, and you say about rocks, "They are really conscious, but it is a different form of consciousness." After all, when I tap on this crystal, which is glass, it makes a noise. Now that resonance is an extremely primitive form of consciousness. Of course, consciousness is much more subtle than that, but when you hit a bell and it rings, or you touch a crystal and it responds, inside itself it has a very simple reaction. It goes "jangle" inside, whereas we go "jangle" with all sorts of colors and lights and intelligence, ideas, and thoughts, and it is more complicated. Yet both are equally conscious, but conscious in different ways. Now that is a perfectly acceptable idea. All I am saying is that minerals are a rudimentary form of consciousness, whereas other people are saying that consciousness is a complicated form of minerals. What they want to do is to say everything is kind of drab, whereas what I want to say is "Hooray! Life is a good show!"

Nevertheless, as we study man or any other living organism and try and describe him accurately and scientifically, we find that our normal sensation of ourselves as isolated egos inside a bag of skin is a hallucination. It really is absolutely nutty because when you describe human behavior, or the behavior of a mouse or a rat or a chicken (or any organism you want to describe), you find that as you try to describe its behavior accurately you must also describe the behavior of its environment. Supposing I walk and you want to describe the action of walking. You cannot talk about my walking without also describing the floor, because if you do not describe the floor and the space in which I am moving all you will be describing is somebody swinging their legs in empty space. So as to describe my walking, you must describe the space in which you find me. You could not see me unless you could also see my background, that which stands behind me. If the boundaries of my skin were coterminus with your whole field of vision you would not see me at all. You would see the things that filled your field of vision, but

you would not see me, because in order to see me you have to see not only what is inside the boundary of my skin, but you have to see what is outside it too.

Now, that is terribly important. Really, the fundamental, ultimate mystery—the only thing you need to know to understand the deepest metaphysical secrets—is this: that for every outside there is an inside and for every inside there is an outside, and although they are different, they go together. There is, in other words, a secret conspiracy between all insides and all outsides, and the conspiracy is to look as different as possible, and yet underneath to be identical. You do not find one without the other. Tweedledee and Tweedledum *agreed* to have a battle. So there is a secret: what is esoteric, what is profound, and what is deep is what we will call the "implicit." What is obvious and in the open is what we will call the "explicit." So, I in my environment and you in your environment are explicitly as different as different could be, but implicitly we go together. This is quickly discovered by the scientist when he tries to describe exactly what you do, and since the whole art of science is to describe your behavior, it is not something that can be separated from the world around you. The scientist realizes then that you are something that the whole world is doing, just as when the sea has waves on it the ocean is waving. So each one of us is a "waving" of the whole cosmos, the entire works, all there is, and with each one of us it is waving and saying, "Yoo-hoo! Here I am!" yet it does it differently each time because variety is the spice of life.

However, the funny thing is we have not been brought up to feel that way. Instead of feeling that we, each one of us, are something that the whole realm of being is doing, we feel that we are something that has come into the whole realm of being as a stranger. When we are born we do not really know where we came from because we do not remember, and so we think when we die that is just going to be that. Some people console themselves with the idea that they are going to Heaven, or that they are going to be reincarnated, or something, but people do not really believe that. For most people it is implausible, and the real thing that haunts them is that when they die they will go to sleep and are

never going to wake up. They are going to be locked up in the safe deposit box of darkness forever and ever. However, all of this depends upon a false notion of what is one's self. Now, the reason why we have this false notion of ourselves, as far as I can understand it, is that we have specialized in one particular kind of consciousness. Generally speaking, we have two kinds of consciousness. One I will call the "spotlight," and the other the "floodlight." The spotlight is what we call conscious attention, and we are trained from childhood that it is the most valuable form of perception. When the teacher in class says, "Pay attention!" everybody stares, and looks right at the teacher. That is spotlight consciousness; fixing your mind on one thing at a time. You concentrate, and even though you may not be able to have a very long attention span, nevertheless you use your spotlight: one thing after another, one thing after another . . . flip, flip, flip, flip, flip. However, we also have floodlight consciousness. For example, you can drive your car for several miles with a friend sitting next to you, and your spotlight consciousness may be completely absorbed in talking to your friend. Nevertheless, your floodlight consciousness will manage the driving of the car, will notice all the stoplights, the other idiots on the road, and so on, and you will get there safely without even thinking about it.

However, our culture has taught us to specialize in spotlight consciousness, and to identify ourselves with that form of consciousness alone. "I am my spotlight consciousness, my conscious attention; that is my ego; that is me." Although we very largely ignore it, the floodlight consciousness is working all the time, and every nerve ending that we have is its instrument. You can go out to a luncheon and sit next to Mrs. So-and-So, and you go home and your wife asks you, "Was Mrs. So-and-So there?"

"Yes, I sat next to her."

"Well, what was she wearing?"

"Well, I haven't the faintest idea."

You saw, but you did not notice. Now, because we have been brought up to identify ourselves with the spotlight consciousness, and

the floodlight consciousness is undervalued, we have the sensation of ourselves as being just the spotlight, just the ego that looks and attends to this and that and the other. So we ignore and are unaware of the vast, vast extent of our being. People, who by various methods become fully aware of their floodlight consciousness, have what is called "a mystical experience," or what the Buddhists call *bodhi,* an awakening. The Hindus call it *moksha,* or liberation, because they discover that the real deep, deep self, that which you really are fundamentally and forever, is the whole of being—all that there is, the works, that is you. Only that universal self that is you has a capacity to focus itself at ever so many different here-and-nows. So, as William James said, "The word 'I' is really a word of position like 'this,' or 'here.'" Just as a sun or star has many rays, so the whole cosmos expresses itself in you and you and you in all the different variations. It plays games: it plays the John Doe game, the Mary Smith game. It plays the beetle game, the butterfly game, the bird game, the pigeon game, the fish game, the star game. These are games that differ from each other just like backgammon, bridge, poker, or pinochle; or like the waltz, mazurka, minuet, and tango. It dances with infinite variety, but every single dance that it does—that is to say, you—is what the whole thing is doing. However, we forget and we do not know who we are. We are brought up in a special way so that we are unaware of the connection, and unaware that each one of us is the works, playing it this way for awhile. So we have been taught to dread death as if it were the end of the show because it will not happen any more. Therefore we are conditioned to be afraid of all the things that might bring about death: pain, sickness, suffering. If you are not really vividly aware of the fact that you are basically "the works," chances are you have no real joy in life, and you are just a bundle of anxiety mixed in with guilt.

When we bring children into the world, we play awful games with them. Instead of saying, "How do you do? Welcome to the human race. Now my dear, we are playing some very complicated games, and these are the rules of the game we are playing. I want you to understand them, and when you learn them when you get a little bit older you might be

able to think up some better rules, but for now I want you to play by our rules." Instead of being quite direct with our children, we say, "You are here on probation, and you must understand that. Maybe when you grow up a bit you will be acceptable, but until then you should be seen and not heard. You are a mess, and you have to be educated and schooled until you are human." These attitudes which are inculcated into us from infancy go on into old age because the way you start out is liable to be the way you finish. So people are going around feeling fundamentally that they do not belong because their parents said to them in the first place, "Look, you are here on sufferance. You are on probation. You are not a human being yet." So people feel this right on into old age and figure that the universe is presided over by this kind of awful God-the-Father parent who has our best interest at heart, and is loving, but "Who spares the rod, spoils the child. Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." So, where is it going to hit next? You do not feel that you belong, and so we get this ghastly sense of what I call the "Christian ego," and it is a little bit Jewish, too, who really feels that he does not belong and is a homeless orphan. The Christians say we are sons of God by adoption; not real sons but only by adoption, grace, and sufferance. So there comes a sensation so characteristic of Western man and, indeed, of all highly civilized people, of being a stranger on the earth, a momentary flash of consciousness between two eternal blacknesses.

Therefore, we find ourselves in constant contentiousness with everything around us, not only with other people but with the earth, with the waters, and the symbol of it all in our culture is the bulldozer. Where I live aboard a ferryboat there are opposite us across the water some lovely hills. They are going to put houses there, but they are going to try and put the sort of houses you would find in a suburban tract lot on a hill. A good architect can make a house fit the hill and he does not have to destroy a hill to put a house on it. If you want to live on a hill, obviously you want to live on a hill, and you do not want to destroy the hill by virtue of living on it. Yet that is what they do, especially in California. In California where we have lots of hills, they always scrape

the tops off them until they are perfectly flat. They put the houses on, and then scrape the hill off in terraces all the way down. Of course, by doing this they upset the ecology of the hill and eventually all houses fall down, but the builder says, "So what?" By that time the payments have been made and obviously the builder does not feel that the external world is his own body, but of course it is. The external world is your own body extended, and an intelligent architect always goes up to the hill and says, "Good afternoon. I very much want to build a house here, and I would want to know what kind of house you would like built on you." Instead of that, he has a prejudice about what kind of a house is a house, and he has to make the hill submit to this prejudice, and so he has to ruin the hill and get rid of it pretty much to put a house on it. He is absolutely out of his mind because he does not realize that the external world is his body, and when he realizes that he will get his mind back.

Man in Nature

Chapter Two

Previously I was discussing the disparity between the way in which most human beings experience their own existence, and the way man's being and nature is described in the sciences. I was pointing out that sciences such as ecology and biology, for example, describe and study the relationship between all organisms and their environments. However, the way they describe human, animal, and insect behavior is in flat contradiction with the way in which most of us experience our thinking, our action, and our existence. We have been brought up to experience ourselves as isolated centers of awareness and action, placed in a world that is not us, that is foreign, alien, and is something other which we confront. Whereas, in fact, the way an ecologist describes human behavior is as an action. What you do is what the whole universe is doing at the place you call "here and now," and you are something the whole universe is doing in the same way that a wave is something that the whole ocean is doing.

Now, this is not what you might call a fatalistic or deterministic idea. You might be a fatalist if you think that you are a sort of puppet which life pushes around and that you are separate from life, but life dominates you. However, in the point of view I am expressing, the real you is not a puppet which life pushes around. The real deep down you is the whole universe, and it is *doing* your living organism and all of its behavior, and expressing it as a singer sings a song. We have been hoodwinked into the feeling that we exist only inside our skins, and I was showing you last

night that that is a hallucination. It is just as nutty as anybody could be who thinks that he is Napoleon, or thinks he is a poached egg and goes around finding a piece of toast to sit on. It is just like that, a hallucination. I was discussing how we need to experience ourselves in such a way that we could say that our real body is not just what is inside the skin but includes our whole total external environment. If we do not experience ourselves that way, we tend to mistreat our environment. We treat it as an enemy. We try to beat it into submission, and if we do that, then comes disaster. We exploit the world we live in and we do not treat it with love and gentleness and respect. We cut down millions of acres of forests to turn it into newspaper, of all things. Lovely trees are turned into information about nothing, and we do not replace them properly. We kick the world around in revenge for our feeling that really we are puppets which the world kicks around.

So, my main point last night was that we need a new kind of consciousness in which every individual becomes aware that his real self is not just his conscious ego. For example, let us consider a headlight of a car. The headlight shines on the road in front of it and not on the wire which connects it with its own battery. So, in a way, the headlight is unaware of how it shines, and in the same way we are unaware of the sources of our consciousness. We do not know how we know. There was a young man who said, "Though it seems that I know that I know, what I would like to see is the 'I' that knows me, when I know that I know that I know." So, we are ignorant; that is, we ignore and it does not come within the scope of our attention how it is that we manage to be conscious, or how it is that we manage to grow our hair, to shape our bones, to beat our heart, and to secrete all the necessary fluids that we need from our glands. We do it, but we do not know how we do it. Underneath the superficial self, which pays attention to this and that, there is another self more really "us" than "I." The more you become aware of the unknown self—if you become aware of it—the more you realize that it is inseparably connected with everything else that is. You are a function of this total galaxy, bounded by the Milky Way, and this galaxy is a function of all other galaxies. You are that vast thing that you

see far, far off with great telescopes, and you look and look, and one day you are going to wake up and say, "Why, *that* is me!" and in *knowing* that you know that you never die. You are the eternal thing that comes and goes, that appears now as John Jones, now as Mary Smith, now as Betty Brown; and so it goes, forever and ever and ever.

Now, the reason I made this point as an introduction is to draw your attention to the problem of the relationship of man and nature. Incidentally, what do you mean when you use the word "nature"? What *is* nature study or natural history? What do you expect to find in the Museum of Natural History? For many people nature means the birds, the bees, and the flowers. It means everything that is not artificial. People think, for example, a building is not natural; it is artificial. The natural state of the human being is to be naked, but we wear clothes, and that is artificial. We build houses, but is there any difference between a human house and a wasp's nest or a bird's nest? Not really, but we do have in our minds the idea that nature is somehow outside us. We believe we have some nature in us, and we say there is a thing called human nature, though it seems to be mostly bad. Human nature, according to Dr. Freud, is motivated by the libido, and you cannot trust it. In the old days they used to beat it with whips, but Freud said, "Don't do it that way! You will have to treat it as a good horse trainer trains a horse by giving it a lump of sugar every now and then, and control it in that way. Be kind to it and respect it, even though it is really very disrespectable."

In the history of philosophy there are three dominant theories of nature. The first theory is the Western theory, which is that nature is a machine, or an artifact. We inherited this idea from the Hebrews who believed that nature was made by God in somewhat the same way a potter makes a pot out of clay or a carpenter makes a table out of wood. It is not insignificant that Jesus is the son of a carpenter because our tradition has been to look upon the world as a construct, as if somebody knows how it was put together. Somebody understands how it was done, and that is the constructor, the architect, the Lord God. However, it so happens that in the eighteenth century Western thought

began to change. People became increasingly doubtful as to whether there was a maker—whether there was a God—but they continued to look upon the creation as an artifact, as a machine. By the time of Newton, people were explaining the world in terms of mechanism and we are still under the influence of that idea today. After all, in an article on human physiology the author will usually include drawings which show the human body as a sort of factory. They show how peristaltic action carries the food in and how it is processed by this organ and that organ, just as if a certain product is fed into a factory as a cow at one end and comes out canned corned beef at the other. The human being is illustrated in just such a way, and in some kinds of rather degraded medicine, that is now practiced when you go to the hospital for a medical examination, you are treated as a machine and they process you. Even if you are perfectly healthy and can walk, nevertheless they have to have you in a wheelchair immediately. Then they put you through a process whereby the heart specialist looks only at your heart, because he does not understand anything else. The otorhinolaryngologist, which means an ear, nose, and throat doctor, looks at that section of you, and he does not know about anything else. Then perhaps a psychiatrist takes a look at you and goodness knows what happens there; and so on, and so on. Everybody looks at you from their specialized point of view as if they were a bunch of mechanics examining your automobile. However, as I said last night, we just ask for this because most of us consider ourselves as chauffeurs inside our bodies, which we own in the same way as we own a car. When it goes wrong we take it to the mechanic to fix it and we do not really identify with our body, just as we do not really identify with our car. So this is the theory which has grown up in the West of nature as an artifact, or something that is made.

The second theory of nature is an East Indian theory. Nature is seen not as an artifact but as drama. Basic to all Hindu thought is the idea that the world is *maya,* a Sanskrit word which means many things. It means magic, illusion, art, and play. All the world is a stage, and in the Hindu idea of nature the ultimate reality of the universe is the self which they call *brahman,* or *atman.* That is what there is; the self—universal,

eternal, boundless, indescribable—and everything that happens happens on the self. This is the same as saying, "It's on me, the drinks tonight are on me," or as we say when we hear the radio, "It's on the speaker." Everything you hear on the radio, whether it be flutes, drums, human voices, or traffic noises, are vibrations of the diaphragm in the speaker. However, the radio does not tell you that. The announcer does not come on every morning and say, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. The following sounds that you are going to hear are vibrations of the diaphragm in your speaker, and they are not really human voices or musical instruments, but just vibrations." They never let you in on that, and in exactly the same way, the universe does not let you in on the truth that all sense experiences are vibrations of the self; not just your self, but *the* self, and all of us share this self in common because it is pretending to be all of us. In this way brahman, the ultimate principle, plays hide and seek eternally, or at least for unspeakably long periods of time. The Hindus measure time in what is called a *kalpa*; that is 4,320,000 years. Perhaps this figure is not meant to be taken literally, but for an unspeakably long time, the brahman, the self, pretends that it is lost, and is us. It gets mixed up in all of our adventures and all our troubles, and all our agonies and tragedies. Then, after the period of 4,320,000 years has elapsed, there is a catastrophe. The universe is destroyed in fire, and after that the brahman wakes up (as Brahma, the mythological creator of the universe) and says, "Well, good, crazy! What an adventure that was!" Then he wipes the sweat off his brow and says, "Shwooo, let's rest a while." So, for another 4,320,000 years the Divine Self rests, and knows who It is. Then It says, "Well, this is rather boring. Let's get going; let's get mixed up again."

Now it does this in a very strange way because the way the Hindus time it, the first of getting mixed up, or getting lost is beautiful. That is the longest period in which everything is right. Life is just glorious. Then there is the next period in which things get a little wonky. Something is vaguely out of order, but that does not last so long. Then the next period is when good and evil are equally balanced, and that is still shorter. And finally comes the shortest period when everything bad

triumphs, and the whole universe blows up and we begin all over again. We are supposed to be living in that period now. It is what is called the *Kali Yuga,* the Age of Darkness, and it began on Friday, February the 23rd, 3123 B.C., and it has 5,000 years to run. However, as it goes on, time gets faster, so do not worry.

Now, there is a third theory of nature which is Chinese, and it is very interesting. The Chinese word for nature is *tzu-jan,* and this expression means "of itself, so," or what happens of itself. We might say "spontaneity," but it almost means "automatic," because automatic is what is self-moving, and we associate the word "automatic" with machinery. However tzu-jan, what-is-so-of-itself, is associated in the Chinese mind not with machinery but with biology. Your hair grows by itself; you do not have to think of how to grow it. Your heart beats by itself; you do not have to make up your mind how to beat it. This is what the Chinese mean by nature. A poem says, "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and grass grows of itself." Their greater principle of nature is called the *Tao,* pronounced "dow" in the Mandarin dialect, "tow" in the Shanghai dialect, "toe" in the Cantonese dialect, so take your choice. Tao means the course of nature, and Lao-tzu, who was a philosopher living a little later than 400 B.C., wrote a book about the Tao. He said, "The Tao which can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." In other words, you cannot describe it. He said the principle of the Tao is spontaneity, and that "the Great Tao flows everywhere, both to the left and to the right. It loves and nourishes all things but does not lord it over them. It accomplishes merits and lays no claim to them." Of course there is a very great difference between the Chinese idea of Tao, as the informing principle of nature, and the Judeo-Christian idea of God as nature's lord and master, because the Tao does not act as a boss. In the Chinese philosophy of nature, nature has no boss. There is no principle that forces things to behave the way they do, and so it is a completely democratic theory of nature. Correspondingly, most Westerners, whether they be Christians or non-Christians, do not trust nature. Of all things nature is the thing least to be trusted. You must manage it. You must watch out for it and it will always go wrong if you do not

watch out, just as the goblins will get you if you do not watch out. So, we are always feeling that we absolutely cannot trust it because we are instilled with the idea of original sin. You cannot trust nature because it comes out with weeds and insects, and above all, you cannot trust human nature.

Now, the Chinese would say, "If you cannot trust yourself you cannot trust anything, because if you cannot trust yourself can you trust your mistrust of yourself? Is that well-founded?" If you cannot trust yourself, you are totally mixed up. You haven't a leg to stand on, and you have no point of departure for anything. In this respect, the Taoist philosophy and the Confucian philosophy are in agreement. In Confucian philosophy, the fundamental virtue of a human being is called *jen.* It is a Chinese character that Confucius placed as the highest of all virtues, higher than righteousness, higher than benevolence, and it means approximately human-heartedness. Now, Confucius once said that "goody-goodies are the thieves of virtue." Virtue in Chinese is *teh,* and it means virtue not in the sense of moral propriety, but virtue in the sense of magic, as when we speak of the healing virtues of a certain plant. A man of true virtue is therefore a human-hearted man, and the meaning of this is that one should, above all, trust human nature in the full recognition that it is both good and bad, that it is both loving and selfish.

Human beings are complex, and we do not really know ourselves at all. Consider your nervous system. Neurologists have not even begun to figure it out, and yet all of your conscious decisions are based on this thing that you do not understand. You are unbelievably more wise in your nature than you ever will be in your conscious thoughts, because behind your conscious thoughts lies your nervous system. If you say, "Well, my nervous system is unreliable. It is just a bunch of strange, weird, biological chances that have somehow become mixed up," then this very opinion that you are expressing is a function of that nervous system. You are saying that you are a total hoax and that you cannot trust yourself at all. Now the lesson of this is that one should above all trust human nature in the full recognition that it is both good and bad,

that it is both loving and selfish. A man of true virtue, therefore, has a sense of what is called *li*. Li is justice, but you cannot write it down. There is another word for justice, or law, in Chinese. In its Chinese character form, this word represents a cauldron for cooking sacrifices along with a knife. In the high and far-off times of Chinese history there was an emperor who scratched with a knife on the side of the cauldrons the laws of the state so that when the people brought their sacrifices of meat to be put in the cauldrons they could read them and understand what they were. However, the sages who advised this emperor said that was a very bad thing to do because the moment people see the law written down, they develop a litigious spirit. That is to say, they think out ways of wangling around it, and this is what we do all the time. The moment Congress passes a law, a tax law especially, all the lawyers get together and they try to fill it full of holes. They say, "Well, it did not define this and it did not say that." So some of those Confucians wanted to put the language in order and to make all the words mean just so, but the Taoists laughed at them and said, "If you define the words, with what words are you going to define the words that define the words?" They said, therefore, that the emperor should not have written the laws down because a sense of justice is not something you can put in words. It is what our lawyers call "equity," and if you talk to any lawyer in discussing various judges around town he will say, "Well, Judge Smith is pretty much a stickler for the letter of the law, but on the other hand Judge Jones has a sense of equity. He knows when the letter of the law just does not apply to a particular case. He has an innate sense of fair play and that is the man to be trusted as a judge." Now this is what the Chinese mean by a judge who has the sense of real justice. It cannot be written down and it cannot be explained. Every case is individual, but what such a man has in his heart fundamentally is that he trusts both the good and bad of human nature.

Nature, human nature included, is an organism; and an organism is a system of orderly anarchy. There is no boss in it but it gets along by being left alone and being allowed to do its stuff. That is what the Chinese Taoist philosophy calls *wu-wei,* which does not mean doing

nothing. It means not interfering with the course of events and not acting against the grain. There is a second word in Chinese pronounced "lee," and this is the time to introduce it. The first li meant justice, but the second *li* is a character which had the original meaning of the markings in jade, the grain in wood, and the fiber in muscle. It is usually translated as the reason or the principle of things, however the best translation of li is *organic pattern.* When you look at the clouds they are not symmetrical. They do not form fours and they do not come along in cubes, but you know at once that they are not a mess. A dirty old ashtray full of junk may be a mess but clouds do not look like that. When you look at the patterns of foam on water they never make an artistic mistake and they are not a mess. They are wiggly but in a way, orderly, although it is difficult for us to describe that kind of order. Now, take a look at yourselves. You are all wiggly. We think that we are pretty ordinary because there are a lot of us who look approximately the same. When we see a human being we think, "Well, that is pretty much in order." It is kind of regular and okay, but we do not realize how wiggly we are. We are just like clouds, rocks, and stars. Look at the way the stars are arranged. Do you criticize the way the stars are arranged? Would you like them to form fours? Would you like them to be set out sort of like needlepoint on the canvas of the skies? During the eighteenth century when they built formal gardens of clipped hedges and made all the tulips stand together like soldiers, there were people who criticized the stars for being irregularly arranged, but today we do not feel that way. We love the way the stars are scattered, and they never make an aesthetic mistake. What about mountain ranges? Do you criticize the valleys for being low, and praise the peaks for being high? No. You just say, "It is great the way it is." Now, to that kind of order the artist pays a tribute by painting a landscape. In every national park there is a place called "Inspiration Point," and people go there and say, "Oh! It's just like a picture!" Nobody knew this four hundred years ago. It took the artists to paint landscapes before people realized how beautiful they are. Nowadays artists paint pictures of damp, stained walls and floors where people have dropped a lot of paint. One day people will walk into

a room where there is a lot of paint scattered on the floor and they will say, "My goodness, it is just like a Jackson Pollock. Isn't it just like a picture?" It always takes the artist to show us the vision, but of course in the meantime, it is difficult to interpret these things. You may go to an exhibition of contemporary, nonobjective painting, and hear someone say, "That's not what I call a picture." This is because it is against their prejudices. However, I say to people, "Now, excuse me, but wait a minute. Take a look at that again. That painting is a colored photograph of *guess what*?" Then they look at it in astonishment with entirely new eyes. What could that be a photograph of? Soon they begin to see that it might be a photograph taken through a microscope, perhaps of globules of germs floating in liquid. It might be anything, but there it is, and its beauty suddenly comes over them. Goodness knows whether that was what the artist intended, but this sort of real abstraction embodies a method of giving people a shock so they will see things in a new way. A GI once visited Picasso in Paris during the war and said, "I cannot understand your paintings. They are absurd. Life does not look like that." Picasso replied, "Do you have a girlfriend?" He said, "Yes." "Have you a picture?" He said, "Yes." "Show it to me." So he drew out his billfold, and there was a little colored photograph of his girlfriend, and Picasso looked at it and said, "Is she so small as that?"

Now then, the idea of li, of natural order, is like the patterns in seafoam, patterns in jade, the shapes of the clouds, the forms of trees and mountains. They are orderly, but we cannot put our finger on the order. We know it is orderly but we do not know why. The order of nature is in that way indefinable. When Saint Augustine was asked, "What is time?" he said, "I know what it is, but when you ask me I don't." So in the same way the Chinese would say, "We know what the order of nature is, but if you ask us, we don't." The poet says, "Picking chrysanthemums along the eastern fence, gazing in silence at the southern hills, the birds fly home through the soft mountain air of dusk." In all these things there is a deep meaning, but when we are about to express it, we suddenly forget the words. That is li. Nature as a self-ordering principle, but it does not really know how it does it. Another

poem says, "If you want to know where the flowers come from even the God of Spring doesn't know." This reveals a very remarkable attitude toward nature. If you translate this into politics it is high philosophical anarchy, and there is a lot to be said for anarchy as a political point of view. In other words, government is always a mess because the state opposes itself to the people. We live under a constitution where we are supposed to be governed by ourselves, but somebody once said, "Down with democracy, when we get it." The state creates itself as a business in competition with all the other businesses, and it wins because it is the biggest one of the bunch. The Taoists said of the state that it should be as anonymous and unobtrusive as possible. Instead of going around in processions and being heralded with waving flags the emperor should be as unobtrusive as the head of the sanitation department. This is a man who goes around in a plain ordinary suit and really attends to his job. He does not have a police escort with sirens blowing and flags waving. He simply does his job. The feeling of Lao-tzu is that the emperor or the president should have the same kind of attitude. He should simply help the people and retire, not claiming any merits for his work, and withdraw behind the scenes. He should not strive for power, but simply help things along. "Govern a great state," Lao-tzu said, "as you would cook a small fish." Now, when you have a small fish in the frying pan do not keep tossing it around and fidgeting with a spatula, otherwise it will fall apart. Turn it gently and softly.

Here is a conception of nature as something you must trust; both outside nature—the birds, the bees, the flowers, the mountains, the clouds—but also inside nature, human nature. Of course, nature is not completely trustworthy. It will sometimes let you down with a wallop, but that is the risk you take, the risk of life. What is the alternative? You might say, "I do not trust nature at all. It has got to be watched." However, that leads to the totalitarian state where everybody is his brother's policeman and everybody is watching everybody else to report them to the authorities. A state where you cannot trust your own motivations is a state where you would have to have a psychoanalyst in charge of you all the time to be sure that you do not think dangerous or

peculiar thoughts. You would report all peculiar thoughts to your analyst and your analyst would keep a *record* of them and report them to the government. Already everybody in this culture is busy keeping records of everything and it is much more important to *record* what happens than to experience the event as it actually happens. This is eating us up because it has become much more important that you have your books in order than it is to conduct your business in a good way.

In universities it is much more important that the registrar's records be correct than have the library well-stocked. After all your grades are all locked up in safes, protected from thievery and pilfering, because they are the most valuable property that the university has; the library can go to ruin. Any sensible person would imagine that the main functioning of a university is to teach students and to do research. Therefore the faculty should be the most important thing in the university, but on the contrary, the administration is the most important. These are the people who keep the records, and who make the game rules up. So the faculty are always being obstructed by the administration, forced into irrelevant meetings, and asked to do everything but scholarship. Do you know what scholarship means, or what a school means? The original meaning of *schola* is leisure. We spoke of a "scholar and a gentleman" because a gentleman was a person who had a private income and could afford to be a scholar. He did not have to earn a living and therefore he could study the classics and poetry. Today nothing is more busy than a school. They make you work, work, work because you have to get through on schedule. There are expedited courses, and you go to school to get a Ph.D. in order to earn a living. So, on the whole, this is a contradiction of scholarship. Scholarship is to study everything that is unimportant and not necessary for survival, including all the charming irrelevancies of life. The reason for this is that if you do not have room in your life for the playful, life is not worth living. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, but if the only reason Jack plays is so that he can work better afterwards, he is not really playing. He is playing because it is good for him, and that is not

playing at all. To be able to be true scholars we have to cultivate an attitude in life in which we are not trying to get anything out of it.

If you pick up a pebble on the beach and look at it, it is beautiful, but do not try to get a sermon out of it. Sermons-in-stones and God-in-everything be damned—just enjoy it! Do not feel that you have got to salve your conscience by saying that this is for the advancement of your aesthetic understanding. Enjoy the pebble. If you do that, you become healthy. You do not *have* to do anything but it is a great idea, and it is a great experience if you can learn what the Chinese call "purposelessness." They think that nature is quite purposeless. However, when we say something is purposeless, it is a put-down. To us this means there is no future in it and it is a washout, but when the Chinese Taoists hear the word purposeless they think that is just great. It is like the waves washing against the shore, going on and on, forever with no meaning. A great Zen master said just before he died, "From the bathtub, to the bathtub, I have uttered stuff and nonsense." The bathtub in which the baby is washed at birth, the bathtub in which the corpse is washed before burial, all this time I have said much nonsense. The birds in the trees go twee, twee, twee. What is it all about? Everybody tries to say, "Ah, yes, it is a mating call—and quite purposeful. They are trying to get their mates by attracting them with a song." This argument is also used to explain why they have colors, and why butterflies have eye-like designs on them for self-protection. Of course, this is an engineering view of the universe, but why do we do that? We say, "Well, it is because the butterflies need to survive." But why survive? What is that for? Well, to survive. However, human beings really are just a lot of tubes, and in a way all living creatures are just tubes. These tubes have to put things in one end and let them go out at the other. Then they become clever about it and they develop nerve ganglia on one end of the tube—the eating-end called a head. It has eyes and ears, and it has little organs and antennae that help you define things to put in one end so that you can let them out the other. Well, while you are doing this the stuff going through wears the tube out and, in order for the show to go on, the tubes have complicated ways of making other tubes which will go on

doing the same thing, in at one end, out the other. And they say, "Well, that is terribly serious. That is awfully important. We have got to keep on doing this."

However, when the Chinese Taoists say nature is purposeless this is a compliment. It is much like the idea of the Japanese word *yugen.* They describe yugen as watching wild geese fly and being hidden in the clouds; as watching a ship vanish behind the distant island; as wandering on and on in a great forest with no thought of return. Haven't you done this? Haven't you gone on a walk with no particular purpose in mind? You carry a stick with you and you occasionally hit at old stumps, and wander along and sometimes twiddle your thumbs. It is at that moment that you become a perfectly rational human being; you have learned purposelessness. All music is purposeless. When you dance do you aim to arrive at a particular place on the floor? Is that the idea of dancing? No, the aim of dancing is to dance. Now, here is the choice. Are you going to trust it or not? If you do trust it you may get let down, and this *it* is your self—your own nature and all nature around you. There are going to be mistakes, but if you do not trust it at all you are going to strangle yourself. You are going to surround yourself with rules and regulations and laws and prescriptions and policemen and guards—and guards to guard the guards. So, to live we must have faith. We must trust ourselves to the total unknown and to a nature which does not have a boss. A boss is part of a system of mistrust and so that is why Lao-tzu's Tao loves and nourishes all things, but does not lord it over them.

Symbols and Meaning

Chapter Three

In order to lay the foundation for this investigation we have to examine ideas that are basic to our common sense, for it is not only emotions that are powerful in human life. Psychoanalysis has, of course, examined the emotional bases of human opinions and beliefs, but one should also examine the intellectual bases of psychological principles, theories, or therapies. Ideas are very powerful. Everybody who speaks any language at all has, underneath the surface of the language or the figuring that he uses, certain basic assumptions which are usually unexamined, and these unexamined systems of belief are extremely influential in our lives.

We will begin with one very pervasive idea that is built into our common sense, which is that the physical world consists of two aspects: respectively, form and matter. This notion was foisted on us by Aristotle and also by the Bible. It is said that God created man out of the dust of the earth, a figurine in His own image, and then breathed the breath of life into its nostrils so that this form of clay became a living being. So, underneath this myth lies the notion that everything material is made of some sort of basic stuff, in the same way clay is the basis of pots. For centuries, scientists and philosophers wanted to know, "What is that stuff? What are we made of?" A carpenter makes tables out of wood; however, I ask you: is a tree made of wood? Obviously not. A tree *is* wood, it is not made of it. Is a mountain made of rock? Obviously not, it *is* rock. In this sense our language contains innumerable ghosts.

Supposing I were to say, "The lightning flashes." Surely the flashing is the same as the lightning. There is not one thing called "lightning" and another called "flashing." The lightning *is* the flashing. It is raining. What is this *it* that is raining? The raining. I can make a noun out of a verb anytime by turning it into a gerund. However, we populate the world with ghosts which arise out of the structure of our language, and therefore from the structure of our thinking because we think in language, figuring, and numbers. So it is fascinating to find the hidden assumptions that underlie language and mathematics, and there is a basic assumption, that almost all of us have, that organisms are made of something, and it comes into our everyday speech again and again as a form and pattern of organization. It is as if there were some inert primordial and, of course, stupid stuff which had to be put into shape by an energy and an intelligence other than the stuff like the intelligence of the potter which shapes the clay.

When our physicists started to find out what stuff was, they went into it again and again, and examined it with ever more minute instruments. First they started cutting up things with knives, and they cut them into smaller and smaller pieces. Finally the particle that they wanted to dissect was exactly the same width as the edge of the knife, and so they discovered the atom. In Greek *atomas* means the "non-cuttable." *A*: non; *tomas*: cut-table. Thus, the basic atom is what you cannot cut anymore because you have come down to the end. However, they were not satisfied with that, so they took an atom—in other words, a particle of something or other that was just the same width as the blade of the knife edge—and they looked at it under a microscope. They saw that it seemed to be composed of even smaller particles, and so they found a means of sorting those out. Eventually they found extraordinary means of investigating the properties of matter until they reached a point where they could not decide whether what they were looking at were particles or waves, so they called them "wavicles" and they thought they had come to certain ultimate wavicles called electrons. Then, unfortunately, everything fell apart, and they found protons, mesons, and many other extraordinary things. Of course, what they did not

realize was that as you develop more and more powerful microscopic instruments, the universe becomes smaller and smaller in order to escape the investigation. In just the same way, when the telescopes become more and more powerful the galaxies have to recede in order to get away from the telescopes because what is happening in all these investigations is, through us and through our eyes and senses, the universe is looking at itself. When you try to turn around to see your own head, what happens? It runs away! You will never get at it. You cannot touch the tip of your finger with the tip of your finger. Shankara explained this principle beautifully in his commentary on the *Kena Upanishad* where he said, "That which is the knower—the ground of all knowledge—is never itself an object of knowledge, just as fire does not burn itself." So there is always that profound mystery and you are never going to be in absolute control of what goes on. As Van Dallieu put it, "The mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced."

The reason why I became a philosopher was that ever since I was a little boy I always felt that existence, as such, was weird. Here we are, and isn't that odd? Of course it is odd, but what do you mean by odd? Well, it is what is different from even, and what is odd stands out. What is even lies flat, but you cannot see the outstanding—the odd—without the flat, or even, background. Each one of us is odd: strange, unique, particular, and different. How do we know what we mean by the word "odd," except against the background of something even that is not differentiated, like space? So, at this point you begin to get a philosophical itch, to scratch your head and think about why this is so. After awhile you may realize that "Why?" is a meaningless question, and so you may ask: *"How* is it so?" Well, that leads you into science and other investigations. So you want to know, "What is it?" I mean, what is this happening, this thing called existence? If you ask that question long enough, it will suddenly hit you that if you could answer it, you would not know what terms to put the answer *in.* When we investigate the properties of nature, and we do find some answers, all the answers are in terms of particular structures, forms, patterns. These can be noted,

and their behavior can be predicted, but we come back to the question "What are the forms made of?" or "What is it *really*?" We cannot think of any way in which we could answer this question, because in order to do so we would have to have a class of all classes.

When you ask the question "What?" it is like saying: "Is you *is* or is you *ain't*?" Are you animal, vegetable, or mineral? Are you a Republican or a Democrat? Are you male or female? Are you a Christian or a Jew or a Hindu, or a what-have-you? We always classify in order to answer the question "What is it?" So, the physicists finally abandoned the quest for stuff, and they gave us a description of the universe entirely in terms of form: the pattern, not the stuff. People ask, "What is the work?" "What is the pattern made of? Surely, there must be an answer to that?" However, what happens is that when you magnify the view in the microscope all stuff turns into form and becomes articulate. From up here the carpet looks like some sort of stuff, but when you look at it under a microscope you will see the crystalline structure of the nylon, or whatever it is made of. Then people want to know, "What are the crystals made of?" Well, magnify it further and you will find molecules. Magnify it even more and you will find wavicles. Then they complain: "But the wavicles must be *of* something!" Of course they are not, and we find substance—or stuff—totally vanishes, and we are left with form. Sanskrit does not really have a word for "matter." *Nama-rupa* means "named form," or the form that matters. Let us put it in another way: everything is a matter of form, and this is fascinating.

We ask, "Does it matter? What does that mean? Is it important?" In other words, does it measure up to anything? Now if we go back to the Indo-European roots of our language, matter comes from a Sanskrit root, *matra,* which means "to measure," to lay out the foundation of a building. So from this root matra if we go on into Sanskrit we come to the word maya, generally translated as illusion, although it also means magic or creative power. The word illusion comes from the Latin *ludere,* to play. "Let us pretend that we matter." Also from the root matra we have "meter," and that is also "to measure;" *metere* in Greek or *mater* in Latin, which means "mama" or "mother." The mother of Buddha was

called Maya, and Mary (*ma* again) is the mother of Jesus—Ma, ma, ma. But ma is a matter of form or pattern, and remember the Chinese call the basic principle of nature li, the markings in jade, the fiber in muscle, and the grain in wood.

What stuff we see is a pattern seen out of focus, where it becomes fuzzy like cotton or kapok. We say kapok is the stuffing of a cushion and that certainly seems to be stuff, but when we examine the kapok closely, we find structure. When you look at it closely that is what you will find, and there will never be anything else. Now this seems crazy because it completely flouts our common sense. Philosophers beat tables that are in front of them and say, "It is there, because . . . *bang*! So there must be something that is stuff, that is substantial." However, the only reason why you cannot pass your hand through a table is the table is moving too fast. It is like trying to put your finger through an electric fan, only it is going much faster than an electric fan. Anything solid is going so fast that there is no way to get your finger through it, that is all. You might say, "*What is it* that is going so fast?" Well, that question is based on a grammatical illusion that all verbs have to have subjects, and that a verb, or action, or event must be set into motion by a noun, that is to say, a non-event or thing. Now what is the difference between a thing and an event? I cannot, for the life of me, tell. We say, "This is a *fist*," which is a noun. Now, what happens to it when I open my hand? The fist has unaccountably disappeared, so I should have called *this* a "fisting," and *that* a "handing." Of course it may also be a "pointing." So, we could devise a language such as that of the Neutka Indians, where there are no nouns and there are only verbs. The Chinese language is very close to that, and the superimposition of the idea of noun and verb on the Chinese language seems to be a Western invention. However, all those languages of Indo-European origin have nouns and verbs in them; they have agents and operations. Now here is one of the basic snags: when we divide the world into operations and agents, doings and doers, we ask such silly questions as, "Who knows?" "Who does it?" "What does it?" Actually, the "what" that is supposed to do it is the same as "the doing," and you can very easily see that the whole doing of the universe may be

understood as a "process." Nobody is doing it. When you go back to doing it, you go back to the military analogy and the chain of command; to the boss who says "jump" and the employee who obeys. Of course, today we know that is a very crude and unsophisticated idea.

So we have suddenly eliminated a "spook," and the spook was called "stuff." So, we are now more at ease with ourselves in a world of form, or *nama-rupa,* named forms. We can, of course, get rid of the names. We can go further and try the experiment of not calling the forms by any names, but merely observing the forms, although when we have got rid of the names we cannot call them "forms," because even that is a name. Still, there is the *bizazz* going on, which Buddhists called *tathata,* and that means "suchness" or "thusness." Actually tathata is "da-da-da," because when a baby first talks it says "da:" "Da, da, da, da." Fathers flatter themselves thinking that it is saying "dada" or "daddy," but it is not, it is saying "da." So the Upanishads say, *Dat vam asi:* you are it. The basic "dat" does not mean anything. Da is like everything else, a musical phenomenon, and good music never refers to anything except the music itself. You do not ask Mr. Bach or Mr. Ravi Shankar, "What do you mean by this music? What is it intended to express?" Bad music always expresses something other than itself, like the *1812 Overture* or the *Sunken Cathedral.* But good music never refers to anything other than the music. If you ask Bach, "What is your meaning?" he would say "Listen! *That* is the meaning."

Limits of Language

Chapter Four

Nature is like musical expression, which means exactly what it says. Giraffes are *giraffing,* trees are *treeing,* stars are *starring,* clouds are *clouding,* rain is *raining,* and people are *peopling.* If you do not understand, look at it again. We notice that all these suchnesses appear and disappear; they keep changing, they come and they go. But if you get hung up on your particular form, you think, "For some strange reason I must go on living as long as possible," and therefore you think you have an instinct to survive. Now the only thing anybody can agree about today, so far as the discussion of ethical and moral problems are concerned, is that we ought to survive. Therefore certain forms of conduct have survival value and certain forms do not. However, when you say to yourself, "I must go on living," you put yourself in a double bind because you submit to a process which is essentially spontaneous and then insist it must happen. The basic form of the double bind which is imposed upon all children is the requirement to do that which will be acceptable only if you do it voluntarily. So, when we say to ourselves, "I must go on," the reason we say this is because we are not living in the realization of eternal now. Instead we are always thinking that the satisfaction of life will be coming later. There is a song that goes: "There is a good time coming be it ever so far away, that one far off divinely sent to which all creation moves." Now, don't kid yourself! As the Hindus have taught us, in the course of time everything gets worse and

eventually falls apart, and comes the Kali-Yuga and Shiva at the end, which is to say, only suckers put hope in the future.

Traditionally there are three classes of people in the Western world: the aristocracy, the proletariat, and the bourgeoisie. The aristocrats live on the past because they come of noble family, and the proletarians live in the present because they have nothing else. The poor bourgeoisie live for the future and so they are the eternal suckers always open to a con game. When they find out that there really is not much of a future *because you are going to die,* they transpose the future into a spiritual dimension. They figure, "This material world is not the real world, but the spiritual world is the real world; and there will be somewhere, somehow, an eternal life for me." As the verse says, "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify, a never-dying soul to save fitted for the sky." Now some might ask, "What are you going to do there?" Well, they do not have the faintest idea. If you ask theologians what they think is going to happen in Heaven, they just dry up. "Why, we are going to play harps!" The average person's idea of Heaven is an absolute bore, like being in church forever. Children see this immediately because when they hear a hymn like "Weary of earth and laden with my sin I look to Heaven and long to enter in," they say, "Oh, God! Heaven is to be in church for always and always!" They think Hell is preferable because at least some excitement is going on. This is apparent in medieval art, and if you go to the Metropolitan Museum in New York you can see Jan Van Eyck's painting of *The Last Judgement* with Heaven on top and Hell below. In Heaven everybody is looking like the cat that swallowed the canary, sitting in rows and looking very smug. God the Father is president and, oh dear, beneath this there is a winged skull like a bat and squirming nude bodies being eaten by snakes. There is something fantastic going on; yet Van Eyck had a ball painting it because it was the only way you could get away with painting nudes and sexy scenes at that time, which is one of the reasons why Hell naturally became much more interesting than Heaven.

So, this hope for the future is a hoax, a perfect hoax. We say that maybe we will make spiritual progress, but in fact everybody puts it off.

"Maybe if I work at yoga for ten or twenty years I will eventually make it to *moksha* or *nirvana*." Of course that is nothing more than a postponement because if you are not fully alive now, how do you think maybe someday you will be? Supposing I were to ask you, "What did you do yesterday?" You may reply, "What *did* I do yesterday? In fact, I have forgotten." Or a person will say, "Well, let me see now; let me get out my notebook. I got up at 7:30 and I brushed my teeth. Then I read the newspaper over a cup of coffee, looked at the clock and dressed, and then got in the car and drove downtown. I did this and that in the office and so on." You go on and on and suddenly you discover that what you have described has absolutely nothing to do with what happened. You have described a scraggly, skeletal, fleshless list of abstractions whereas, if you were actually aware of what went on, you could never describe it. You could never describe it because nature is multidimensional, and language is linear and scrawny. Therefore, if you identify the world as it is with the way the world is described, it is as if you were trying to eat dollar bills and expect a nutritious diet. A lot of people try to eat numbers. People play the stock market and they are doing nothing but eating numbers. They are always unhappy because they never get anything. Therefore, they always hope more is coming because they believe that if they eat enough dollar bills eventually something satisfactory will happen. So, by eating the abstractions all the time we want more and more and more.

Confucius very wisely said, "A man who understands the Tao in the morning may die with content in the evening." This is so because when you gain understanding, you do not put your hope in time because time will not solve a thing. So when we enter into the practice of meditation, of yoga, we are doing something radically unlike other human activities. Of course, the way yoga is sold in the United States, like everything else, is that it is supposed to be good for you. It is not. It has nothing to do with anything that is good for you. It is the one activity which you do for its own sake and not for any other reason. Obviously it will not lead anywhere, because you cannot go to the place where you are *now*. Yoga is to be completely here and now. That is why the word *yoke* means

"join," to get with it and be completely here and now. This is the real meaning of concentration, to be in your center. The Christian word for "sinning" in Greek is *amatanene,* which means "to miss the point." The point is this: eternal life means to be here now, to come to your senses.

Yoga is defined in Sanskrit in the Yoga sutra as *yoga chitra briti derota.* This is difficult to translate, but roughly means *yoga* is the stopping of, *briti* is turning like a wheel, and *chitra* is consciousness: "turnings in consciousness." It is the attempt of the mind to catch hold of itself, which is what we call thinking or worrying, so you could say loosely that yoga is the cessation of thinking. It is not the cessation of awareness, but of symbolizing or trying to catch or clutch reality in terms of thoughts, symbols, descriptions, and definitions. We try to give up clutching, but it is not easy because we do it habitually. However, until there is silence of the mind, it is almost impossible to understand eternal life, that is to say, eternal now. This is a stage of having no conceptions, or in Sanskrit the stage of *nirvikalpa,* "not conceptual." So to understand nonverbal reality or nonconceived reality, called "suchness" or *tathata,* it is really very easy. In fact it is *too* easy, which is why it is difficult. But then when you are fully aware and not thinking, you will notice some amazing absences: *there is no past.* Incidentally, can you hear anything past? Can you hear anything future? They are just not there to the plain sense of one's ears, and so in a way ears are easiest to begin with. Can you hear anyone listening to something else other than sound? Can you hear the listener? Of course not, because no sound is there. Then you become again as a child and simply forget all that you were ever told and contemplate on what is. It seems weird, but you then enter into the eternal state *where there is no problem.* After a while you go back and you collect your opinions again, and you think: "Well, that will not do. How can I be practical and be in that sort of state?"

I remember in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus had a lot to say about this. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Then Jesus said, more or less, "And if God so clothed the grass or the field which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven,

shall He not much more clothe you faceless ones? So do not worry about tomorrow saying, 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Or how shall we clothe ourselves?' All the rabble seek after these things and sufficient to the day is the worry of it." Nobody ever preaches a sermon on that text, and I have heard lots of sermons but never one on that topic. Instead, people say, "Look, that's all very well because Jesus was the boss's son, and he knew that he was really in charge of the universe and had nothing to worry about. But we have to be practical." Well, what do you suppose the Gospel was? It was the *good news,* but it *never got out*! You, too, are the boss's son: that was the gospel.

If Jesus had lived in India they would not have put him to death, because everybody in India knows we are all God in disguise. So if he had said, "I and the Father are one," in India they would have said, "Hooray! You found out!" Lots of people in India know that perfectly well, but here? Uh! uh! That is a no-no! "Just who do you think you are? *You* own the place? You keep your position! You are just a critter." This understanding is reflected in the family system, as well as in everything else in India. They have their own way of doing it because they have delayed action on it. When you get to be a certain age, and after you have studied long enough with a certain guru, then and only then may you realize this. But until then it is still a no-no. However, after you have put in the time they finally let you in. In our culture you have to wait until you are dead.

Well, all of that is nonsense. The only place to begin is here and now, because *here* is where we are. So why do we put it off? A lot of people say, "Well, I am not ready." What do you mean you are not ready? What do you have to do to be ready? You might say "I am not good enough because I am neurotic, I am perhaps not old enough or not mature enough for such knowledge. I am still frightened of pain, and of course I would have to overcome that. I am still dependent on material things. I have to eat a lot, drink a lot, have sex, and all that kind of thing, and I think I had better get all that under control first." But what you really mean is you have a case of spiritual pride. You want to be able to congratulate yourself for having gone through the discipline which is

rewarded with realization. That is like trying to quench fire with fire. You may think to yourself: "Wouldn't it be great to be a mystic?" Look at it this way: it would be *wild* to have no fear, no attachments, no hang-ups and to be as free as the air so that you can just wander out in the streets, give away all your clothes to the beggars, and let go of the whole thing. Wouldn't it be wild to have that kind of courage? But if you look into yourself honestly you will find that you are actually a quaking mess of sensitivity. This desire to be the great mystic is nothing more than a symptom of your quaking mess; it is a self-defense mechanism.

You may think, "Wow! We will do yoga and get real tough." Well, that only means you are going to be increasingly insensitive, running away from the quaking mess and trying to escape. Yet you never can escape because you are stuck with it. There is nothing you can actually do to transform your own nature into unattached selflessness because you have a selfish reason for wanting to do it. Well, that is pretty depressing, isn't it? Then you may say: "You mean to tell me that the only people who really get enlightened and liberated are those whom the grace of God somehow hits in an arbitrary way? And all I can do is sit around and wait?" Well, let us begin with that supposition. Let us suppose there is nothing we can do to change ourselves. Psychotherapy and religion are absolutely in vain; there is nothing you can do about it. It is like trying to lift yourself up by your own bootstraps.

Now one might say, "That is terribly depressing. You mean, Alan Watts, you come here simply to tell us that there is nothing we can do? I mean, here we are all presumably assembled in a cultural, spiritual, and psychotherapeutic milieu where we are supposed to get better. Now you tell us there is nothing you can do about it. Well, give us our money back! We will go to somebody else who will be more encouraging!" But wait a minute; what does it mean that you cannot do anything about it? It is singing loud and clear: The reason you cannot do anything about it is because *you do not exist,* that is, as an ego, as a soul, as a separate will. It just is not so. When you understand that, you are liberated. As they say in Zen, "You cannot take hold of it nor can you get rid of it. In not being able to get it, you get it. When you are silent it speaks. When you

speak it is silent." However, do not misunderstand me, because this is not any kind of fatalism when I say "you" as you conceive yourself to be. Your ego or your image of yourself is not there and it does not exist. I am saying it is an abstraction. It is like the number "three." Did you ever see three? Just plain, ordinary *three*? No, you did not, and nobody ever saw it. So it is a concept, or in Sanskrit a *vilkalpa.* There is the happening, the suchness, but it is not pushing you around because there is no you to be pushed around, like a billiard ball stuck on the end of the cue. There is the cue, and it goes this way and goes that way. They call a Buddha a *tathagata,* one who comes or goes thus, this way and that way. So this illusion of the persecuted ego who is pushed around by fate has altogether disappeared, and likewise the illusion of the ego who pushes fate around has also disappeared. There is simply a happening. So in this do you see what has happened? By dying to yourself, having become completely incompetent and finding that you do not exist, you are reborn and you become everything. In the words of Sir Edwin Arnold, "Forgoing self, the universe grows I."

Images of God

Chapter Five

I imagine that most of you know the old story about the astronaut who went far out into space and was asked on his return whether he had been to Heaven and seen God, and he said, "Yes." So they said to him "Well, what about God?" And he said, "She is black." Now although this is a very well-known and well-worn story, it is very profound. I once knew a monk who started out in life as pretty much an agnostic or an atheist, and then he began to read the writing of Annie Besant, the British theosophist who proclaimed the vital force, the *élan vital.* The more he read this kind of philosophy, the more he saw that these people were really talking about God. I have read a great deal of theological reasoning about the existence of God, and all of them start out on this line of reasoning. If you are intelligent and reasonable you cannot be the product of a mechanical and meaningless universe. Figs do not grow on thistles, grapes do not grow on thorns, and therefore you, as an expression of the universe and as an aperture through which the universe is observing itself, cannot be a mere fluke. If this world "peoples" as a tree brings forth fruit, then the universe itself, the energy which underlies it—the "ground of being" as Paul Tillich called it—must be intelligent. However, when you come to that conclusion you must be very careful, because you may make an unwarranted jump to the conclusion that that intelligence, that marvelous designing power which produces all this, is the biblical God. Be careful, because that God,

contrary to His own commandments, is fashioned in the graven image of a paternal, authoritarian, beneficent tyrant of the ancient Near East.

Now it is very easy to fall into that trap because it has been institutionalized in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Synagogue, and in the Protestant Church. It is all there, ready for you to accept, and by the pressure of social consensus it is very natural for us to assume that when somebody uses the word "god" it is that father figure which is intended. Even Jesus used the analogy "the Father" for his experience of God because there was no other one available to him in his culture, but these days we are in rebellion against the image of the authoritarian father. However, to reject the paternalistic image of God as an idol is not necessarily to be an atheist, although I have advocated something called "atheism in the name of God" as an experience, a contact, or a relationship with God that is the ground of your being and does not have to be embodied or expressed in any specific image. Now, theologians on the whole do not like this idea because, as I find in my discourse with them, they want to be a little bit hard-nosed about the nature of God. They want to say that indeed God has a very specific nature. Ethical monotheism insists that the governing power of this universe has some extremely definite opinions and rules to which our minds and acts must be conformed, and if you do not watch out you will go against the fundamental grain of the universe and be punished. In some old-fashioned way you will burn in the fires of Hell forever or, in more modern fashion, you will fail to be an authentic person. That is another way of talking about it, but there is a feeling in this that there is an authority behind the world and it is not you, it is something else. Therefore, this Jewish-Christian and indeed Muslim approach makes a lot of people feel rather estranged from the root and ground of being.

There are a lot of people who never grow up and are always in awe of an image of grandfather. Now I am a grandfather; I have five grandchildren and so I am no longer in awe of grandfathers. I know I am just as stupid as my own grandfathers were, and therefore I am not about to bow down to an image of a god with a long white beard. Of course intelligent people do not really believe in that kind of a god. We

think that God is spirit, that God is undefinable and infinite, but nevertheless the images of God have a far more powerful effect upon our emotions than our ideas. When people read the Bible and sing hymns, "Ancient of Days Who sittest on a throne in glory, immortal, invisible God, only wise and light inaccessible, hid from our eyes," they still envision that fellow up there with a beard. Of course this image is way in the back of the emotions, and so to balance our prejudice we should think first of all in contrary imagery, and the contrary imagery is "She is black." Imagine instead of God the Father, God the Mother. Imagine that this is not a luminous being, blazing with light, but an infathomable darkness, such as is portrayed in Hindu mythology by *Kali,* the great Mother, who is represented in the most terrible imagery. Kali has a tongue hanging out drooling with blood. She has fanged teeth, with a scimitar in one hand and a severed head in the other, and she is trampling on the body of her husband who is *Shiva.* Furthermore, Shiva also represents the destructive aspect of a deity, wherein all things are dissolved so that they can be reborn again. So here is this bloodsucking, terrible mother as the image of the supreme reality behind this universe, and it is representative of the octopus, the spider, the awful-awfuls, and the creepy-crawlers at the end of the line of which we are all terrified.

Let us suppose, just for the sake of argument, that as you sit here right now you are feeling fairly all right. You are not in a hospital and you do not have the screaming meemies. In fact, you have probably had dinner and are feeling pretty good. However, you know that you feel good because very far off in the background of your minds, you have the sensation of something absolutely ghastly that simply must not happen. So against that which is not happening and which does not necessarily have to happen, but by comparison with that, you feel pretty all right. Now that absolutely ghastly thing that must not happen at all is represented by Kali, and therefore at once we begin to wonder whether the presence of this Kali is not in a way very beneficent. How would you know that something was good unless you were able to contrast it with something not good at all?

In pointing this out, I am not putting this forward as a final position. I am only putting it forward as a variation, as a way of beginning to look at a problem, and getting our minds out of their normal ruts, much in the same way if we say of the godhead, "She is black." First of all the feminine "she" represents what is called philosophically "the negative principle." Now women in our culture today do not like to be associated with the negative because the negative has acquired very bad connotations. We say, "Accentuate the positive." Well, that is a purely male chauvinistic attitude. How would you know that you were outstanding unless by contrast there was something instanding? You cannot imagine the convex without the concave and you cannot appreciate the firm without the yielding. Therefore, the so-called negativity of the feminine principle is obviously life-giving and very important, but we live in a culture which does not notice it. You may see a painting, a drawing of a bird, and you do not notice the white paper underneath it. If you look at a printed book, you may think that the words are what is important and that the page does not matter. Yet, if you reconsider the whole thing, how could there be visible print without the page underlying it? What is called substance stands underneath; *sub* is underneath, *stance* stands. To be substantial is to be underlying, to be the support and the foundation of the world. It is of course the great role of the feminine to be the substance. Therefore the feminine is represented by space, which is of course black, and were it not for black and empty space there would be no possibility whatsoever of seeing the stars. Stars shine out of space, and certain very high-powered astronomers are beginning to realize that stars are a function of space.

Now this idea of space is difficult because in our common sense we think that space is simply inert nothingness, and we do not realize that space is completely basic to everything. It is like your consciousness, and nobody can even imagine what consciousness is. It is the most illusive whatever-it-is that there is at all because it is the background of everything else that we know, and therefore we do not really pay much attention to it. We pay attention to the things within the field of consciousness, to the so-called things that are in the field of vision, and

to the sounds that are in the field of hearing. But whatever it is that embraces all of that, we do not pay much attention to it, and in fact we cannot even think about it. It is like trying to look at your head: what do you find? You do not even find the black blob in the middle of things; you do not find anything. Yet that is that out of which you see, just as space is that out of which the stars shine. So, there is something very strange about all this which you cannot put your finger on, that which always escapes you and is completely illusive. Yet the black seems to be absolutely necessary for there to be anything whatsoever.

Kali also is the principle of death. She carries a scimitar in one hand and a severed head in the other. Death is tremendously important to think about but we put it off, and it is swept under the carpet in our culture. In the hospital they try to keep you alive as long as possible in utter desperation, and they will not tell you that you are going to die. When relatives have to be informed that it is a hopeless case they are told not to tell the patient. So all the relatives come around with hollow grins and say, "Well, you will be all right in a month or so, and then we will go and have a holiday somewhere and sit by the sea and listen to the birds." Of course the dying person knows that this is mockery. We have made death howl with all kinds of ghouls. We have invented dreadful afterlives, and the Christian version of Heaven is as abominable as the Christian version of Hell. After all, nobody wants to be in church forever. Children are absolutely horrified when they hear hymns which say, "Prostrate before thy throne to lie and gaze on thee." They cannot imagine what this imagery means. Now in a very subtle theological way I could wangle that statement around to make it extremely profound. To be prostrate at once and to gaze upward on the other hand is a coincidence of opposites, which is very deep. However, to a child it is just a crick in the neck, and that is the sort of imagery we have been brought up with. The common idea of what might happen after death is that you are going to be faced with your judge, the one who knows all about you—the Big Papa—who knows you were a naughty boy or a naughty girl from the beginning of things and is going to look right through to the core of your inauthentic existence. What kind of heebie-

jeebies does this bring up? Perhaps you may believe in reincarnation and you think that your next life will be full of the rewards or the punishments for what you have done in this life. Although you may have gotten away with murder in this life, the most awful things are going to happen next time around, and so you look upon death as a catastrophe. Then there are other people who say, "Well, when you are dead you are dead, and nothing is going to happen at all. So what do you have to worry about?" Well, we do not quite like that idea because it spooks us. What would it be like to die, to go to sleep and never, never wake up? Well, there are a lot of things it is *not* going to be like. It is not going to be like being buried alive. It is not going to be like being in the darkness forever. It is going to be as if you never had existed at all, and not only you, but everything else as well. There never was anything, there is no one to regret it, and there is no problem. Well, think about that for awhile. It is kind of a weird feeling you get when you really think about that and imagine what it would be like to really just stop altogether. Of course you cannot even call it stopping because you cannot have stopping without starting, and so there never was any start. There is just no-thing and when you come to think of it, that is the way it was before you were born. If you go back in memory as far as you can go you come to the same place as you do when you go forward in your anticipation of the future. You may, ask what it is going to be like to be dead and this gives you the funny idea that this blankness is the necessary counterpart of what we call being.

We all think we are alive. We assume we are really here, and that there really is something called "existence." However, the existentialist shouts "Here we are!" Now, how could you experience that as a reality unless you had once been dead? What gives us any ghost of a notion that we are here except by contrast with the fact that we once were not, and later on will not be? Life is a cycle, much like the positive and negative poles in electricity. So this, then, is the value of the symbolism of "She is black." She is the womb principle, the receptive, the instanding, the void, and the dark, and so that is to come into the presence of the God who has no image. Behind the father-image, behind

the mother-image, behind the image of light inaccessible, and behind the image of profound and abysmal darkness, there is something else which we cannot conceive at all. Saint Dionysius called it the "luminous darkness." Nargajuna called it *sunyata,* the void. Shankara called it *brahman,* that of which nothing at all can be said, *neti-neti,* beyond all conception whatsoever. However, this is not atheism in the formal sense of the word. On the contrary, this is a profoundly religious attitude because it corresponds practically to an attitude toward life of total trust in letting go. When we form images of God, they are all really exhibitions of our lack of faith. They are something to hold on to, and something to grasp. How firm is the foundation that lies underneath us, the Rock of Ages, or whatever you want to hold onto? However, when we do not grasp, we have the attitude of faith. If you let go of all the idols you will of course discover that what this unknown is, which is the foundation of the universe, is precisely you. Yet it is not the *you* you think you are. It is not your opinion of yourself, it is not your idea or image of yourself, and it is not the chronic sense of muscular strain which we usually call "I." Of course you cannot grasp it, but why would you need to? Even if you could, what would you *do* with it, or who would do *what* with it? You can never get at it because it is the profound central mystery. So the attitude of faith is to stop chasing it and stop grabbing it, because if that happens the most amazing things follow. However, all of these ideas of the spiritual, the godly, and this attitude that "We *must* follow the laws which have been laid down and we are bound to follow" are not the only way of being religious and of relating to the ineffable mystery that underlies ourselves and the world.

Sense of Nonsense

Chapter Six

It is commonly said that the root of most human unhappiness is the sense that one's life has no meaning. I suppose this is most frequently said in circles interested in psychotherapy because the feeling of meaninglessness is often equated with the existence of neurosis. So many activities into which one is encouraged to enter, including philosophies one is encouraged to believe and religions one is encouraged to join, are commended on the basis of the fact that they give life a meaning. It is very interesting to try and figure out what this idea itself means, or what is intended when it is said that life has to have a purpose. I remember so well as a child listening to sermons in church in which the preacher would constantly refer to God's purpose "for you and for me." Yet, I could never make out what it was because the reverend gentleman seemed to be evasive when asked, "What is the purpose of God for the world?" We used to sing a hymn that "God is working His purpose out as the year succeeds the year," and when one questioned this, the nearest clue one found was in the refrain of the hymn: "Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea." Now of course, that raises the question, "What is the glory of God?"

It becomes pretty obvious that when we talk about life having or not having a meaning, we are not using quite the ordinary sense of the word "meaning" as the attribute of a sign. We are not saying that we expect

this natural universe to behave as if it were a collection of words, signifying something other than themselves, and it is not a point of view which would reduce the significance of our lives in the world merely to the status of signs. Obviously meaning is being used in some different sense than that, as Goethe's famous lines at the end of *Faust:* "All that is mortal, or all that is perishable, is but a symbol." So the question arises, a symbol of what? What do we want to feel, or what would satisfy us as being the meaning behind this world? It is so often said that we do not follow our ideas and our desires through. Most of the things that we want very fervently are things that we have only half-glimpsed. Our ideals are very often suggestions or hints, and we do not really know exactly what we mean when we think about it. However, there is an obscure sense in which we feel that life ought to have significance, and to be a symbol in at least that sense if not so arid a symbol as just a mere sign.

Perhaps it also may mean that life is meaningful. An individual feels that his life amounts to something when he belongs and fits in with the execution of some group enterprise and he feels he belongs in a plan. This seems to give people a sense of great satisfaction, but we have to pursue that question further. Why is it that a plan and that fellowship with other people gives the sense of meaning? Does it perhaps come to another sense of meaning in which life is felt to be meaningful when one is fully satisfying one's biological urges, including the sense of hunger, the desire for love, and the need for self-expression in activity? But we have to push that inquiry further. What do our biological urges really point towards? Are they always projected towards a future? Are biology and its processes nothing but "going on towards going on towards going on"?

However, there is a fourth and more theological sense of the meaning of life. In all theistic religions the meaning of life is God himself. In other words, all this world means a person, it means a heart, it means an intelligence, and the relationship of love between God and man is the meaning of the world. The site of God is the glory of God, and so on, but again here is something to be further pursued. What is it

that we want in sharing love with a person, and even with a person in the sense of the Lord God? What is the content of it? What is it that we are really yearning after? If we go back to the first point, taking Goethe's words that all that is transitory is but a symbol and that we want to feel that all things have significance, it does seem to me that there is a sense in which we often use the word "significance" where the word seems to be chosen quite naturally, and yet at the same time it is not quite the right word. When we say, for example, in reference to a musical composition, that we feel it to be significant, we do not mean that it expresses some particular kind of concretely realizable emotion, and certainly it is not imitating the noises of nature. Indeed, a musical program that deliberately sets out to express sadness or joy by simply imitating something else is not the kind of thing I mean. So often when one listens to the beautiful arabesque character of the Baroque composers, Bach or Vivaldi, it is felt to be significant not because it means something other than itself, but because it is so satisfying as it is. We use the word "significance" so often in moments when our impetuous seeking-for-fulfillment cools down, and we can give ourselves a little space to watch ordinary things.

In those moments when our inner turmoil has really quieted, we find significance in things that we would not expect to find significant at all. This is, after all, the art of those modern photographers who have shown genius in turning the camera towards peeling paint on an old door, or sand and stones on a dirt road, showing us that if we look at it in a certain way these things are significant. However, we cannot say they are significant "of what" so much as significant "of themselves." Perhaps significance then is the quality of a state of mind in which we notice that we are overlooking the significance of the world by our constant quest for it later. All this language is of course quite naturally vague and imprecise because, I think, "significance" is the wrong word to use although it comes so naturally to us.

It was Clive Bell, the great aesthetician, who said that the characteristic of art, and especially the characteristic of aesthetic success in painting, was the creation of significant form. Again, this is a very

vague, imprecise expression. However, it certainly is an attribute not only of those moments in which we are tranquil inside, but also of those moments of deep, spiritual experience that would be called *moksha* in Hinduism (meaning "release") or *satori* in Zen. In those moments the significance of the world seems to be the world, and what is going on now. We do not look any further, because the scheme of things seems to justify itself at every moment of its unfoldment. I pointed out that this was particularly characteristic of music, of dancing, of belonging with one's fellow man, and of the carrying out of some significant pattern of life which I mentioned as a second sense of the world being meaningful. The character of this feeling is again something that is fulfilled in itself. In singing the music with other people, we find that even though the pattern does not point to anything else outside itself we get the sense of meaning, and this is also obviously the case so often in the satisfaction of the biological urges. Does one live to eat or eat to live? I am not at all sure about this. Very often I am sure I live to eat because, although I do not like eating alone, sitting around a table and enjoying food with people is absolutely delightful. Generally when we do this we are not thinking that we have to eat because it is good for us, and that we have to "throw something down the hatch," as Henry Miller said, and swallow a dozen vitamins just because our system needs nourishment.

I remember reading an article in *Consumer Reports* about bread. It seems there had been some correspondence in protest of the white bread one buys in the stores saying it is perfectly inedible and lacking in nutrition, and that it was much better to eat peasant-type bread like rough pumpernickel and loaves of that kind. The experts replied that our white bread is perfectly full of nutrients and there is nothing really the matter with it at all. Well, I felt that it is not a matter of the bread being deficient in the essential vitamins. Bread is not medicine, it is food, and one's complaint against it is that it is bad cookery. It tastes of nothing. However, so often we do tend to look upon food for what it will do for us, rather than the delight of eating it. Yet, if the satisfaction of biological urges is to mean anything, surely the point of these urges is not mere survival. We might say the point of the individual is simply that

he contributes to the welfare of the race, and the point of the race is that it "reproduces itself to reproduce itself to reproduce itself" and just to keep on going. But of course that is not really a point at all; that is just fatuous. Surely the human race keeps going because going on is great fun. If it is not and never will be, then there is obviously no point in going on from the most hedonistic standpoint. Then we come to the question, "What is fun?" or, in other words, "What is the joy of it?" Again we come to something that cannot very well be explained in the ordinary language of meaning in the sense of one thing leading to something else. This becomes preeminently true if we think of the question in theological language. In any of the theistic religions the meaning of life is God, but then what is God doing? What is the meaning of God? Why does He create the universe? What is the content of the love of God for His creation? Well, we have the frank answer of the Hindus that the godhead manifests the world because of *lila,* which is Sanskrit for "play." Likewise, this is said in the Hebrew scriptures and in the Christian Old Testament in the Book of Proverbs where there is a marvelous speech by the divine wisdom, Sophia. In describing the function of the divine wisdom in the creation of the world we find that the world is seen as a manifestation of the wisdom of God. In producing men and animals and all the creatures of the earth, wisdom is playing, and it was the delight of wisdom to play before the presence of God. When it is likewise said in the scriptures that the Lord God created the world for His pleasure, this again means, in a sense, for play. Certainly this seems to be what the angels in Heaven are doing according to the traditional symbolic descriptions of Heaven when they are ringed around the presence of the Almighty, calling out "Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!" through all eternity. Well, "alleluia" may have meant something originally, but as it is used now it does not mean anything, except perhaps "whoopee!" It is an exclamation of nonsensical delight, and it was Dante in *The Paradiso* who described the song of the angels as the laughter of the universe.

Now this sense of nonsense as the theme of the divine activity also comes across very strongly in the Book of Job. I always think that the

Book of Job is the most profound book in the whole Bible, Old Testament and New Testament. Here is the problem of the righteous man who has suffered and all his friends try to rationalize it and say, "Well, you must have suffered because you really had a secret sin after all, and you deserve the punishment of God." So after they had their say, the Lord God appeared and said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge?" He then proceeded to ask Job and his friends a series of absolutely unanswerable conundrums, pointing out all the apparent irrationality and nonsense of His creation. For example, He said, "Why do I send rain upon the desert where no man is?" Most commentators on the Book of Job end with the remark that, "This poses the problem of suffering and the problem of evil, but does not really resolve it." Yet in the end Job himself seems to be satisfied. He somehow surrenders to the apparent unreasonableness of the Lord God, and this is not, I think, because Job is beaten down and becomes unduly impressed with the royal, monarchical, and paternalistic authority of the deity and does not dare to answer back. Instead, he realizes that somehow these very questions *are* the answer. Of all the commentators on the Book of Job, I think the person who came closest to this point was G. K. Chesterton. He once made the glorious remark that it is one thing to look with amazement at a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist, but it is quite another thing to look at a hippopotamus, a creature who does exist, but looks as if he does not. In other words, when you see this strange world with its weird forms like hippopotami, do not take them for granted. Stones and trees and water and clouds and stars are as weird as any hippopotamus, or any imagination of fabulous beasts of gorgons and griffins. They are just plain improbable, and it is in this sense that they are the "alleluia," as it were, or the nonsense song of the universe.

Why do we love nonsense? Why do we love Lewis Carroll with his "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe, all mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe. . . ."? Why is it that all those old English songs are full of "Fal-de-riddle-eye-do" and "Hey-nonny-nonny" and all those babbling choruses? Why is it that

when we get “hep” with jazz we just go “Boody-boody-boop-de-boo” and so on, and enjoy ourselves *swinging* with it? It is this participation in the essential glorious nonsense that is at the heart of the world, not necessarily going anywhere. It seems that only in moments of unusual insight and illumination that we get the point of this, and find that the true meaning of life is no meaning, that its purpose is no purpose, and that its sense is non-sense. Still, we want to use the word “significant.” Is this significant nonsense? Is this a kind of nonsense that is not just chaos, that is not just blathering balderdash, but rather has in it rhythm, fascinating complexity, and a kind of artistry? It is in this kind of meaninglessness that we come to the profoundest meaning.

Coincidence of Opposites

Chapter Seven

It is really very unorthodox and unacademic to start a discussion with a group of psychologists on the subject of metaphysics, but it is essential that we do so. A lot of people say that their approach to life is scientific, as distinct from metaphysical, and that metaphysics is *bosh.* However, everybody, by virtue of being a human being, is willy-nilly a metaphysician. Everybody starts from certain fundamental assumptions as to what the good life is, what they want, or what their axioms for living are. Now I find that psychologists generally tend to be blind to these fundamental assumptions. Perhaps it is truer of psychiatrists than of psychologists, but there is a tendency to feel that they are scientists. In fact they tend to bend over backwards to have a scientific status because that is fashionable in our age. However, it is amusing that psychoanalysts have pointed out to many philosophers that their philosophical ideas are capable of being shown to have a psychoanalytic reference. The philosopher is very grateful to the psychoanalyst for revealing to him his unconscious and its emotional contents, but the psychoanalyst must in turn await a revelation from the philosopher as to his philosophical unconscious and the unexamined assumptions which lie within it.

So if I may start by insulting your intelligence with what is called the most elementary lesson, I would like to talk about the thing that we should have learned before we learned "1-2-3" and "A-B-C," but somehow was overlooked. This lesson is quite simply that anything we experience through our senses, whether sound, light, or touch, is a vibration. Now, a vibration has two aspects: one called "on," and the other called "off." Vibrations seem to be propagated in waves, and every wave system has crests and troughs. So life is a system of now-you-see-it, now-you-don't, and these two aspects always go together. For example, sound is not pure sound; it is a rapid alternation of sound and silence, and that is simply the way things are. However, one must remember that the crest and the trough of a wave are inseparable. Nobody has ever seen crests without troughs or troughs without crests. Just as you do not encounter in life people with fronts but no backs, you do not encounter a coin that has heads but no tails. Although the heads and the tails, the fronts and the backs, the positives and the negatives are different, they are at the same time one. Fundamentally, one has to get used to the notion that different things can be inseparable, and that what is explicitly two can at the same time be implicitly one. However, if you forget that, very funny things happen. We forget that black and white are inseparable, and that existence is constituted equivalently by being and non-being. We then become scared, and feel we have to play a game called "Uh-oh, Black Might Win." And once we get into the fear that the negative side might win, we are compelled to play the game called "But White Must Win," and from that start all our troubles.

The human awareness is a very odd mechanism, although I do not think "mechanism" is quite the right word, but it will do for the moment. We have as a species specialized in a certain kind of awareness which we call conscious attention, and by this we have the faculty of examining the details of life very closely. We can restrict our gaze in a way that corresponds somewhat to the central field of vision in the eyes. We have central vision and we have peripheral vision. Central vision is that which we use for reading and for all sorts of close work, much like using a spotlight. However, peripheral vision is more like using a

floodlight. Civilized human beings have learned to specialize in concentrated attention. Even if a person's attention span is short, they are, as it were, wavering their spotlight over many fields. The price which we pay for specialization in conscious attention is ignorance of everything outside its field. I would rather say "ignore-ance," than ignorance, because if you concentrate on a figure, you tend to ignore the background and you tend, therefore, to see the world in a disintegrated aspect. You take separate things and events seriously, imagining that these really do exist, when actually they have the same kind of existence as an individual's interpretation of a Rorschach blot; they are what you make out of it.

In fact our physical world is a system of inseparable differences. Everything exists with everything else, but we contrive not to notice that because what we notice is what we consider noteworthy, and we notice it in terms of notations, numbers, words, and images. What is notable, noteworthy, notated, and noticed is what appears to us to be significant, and the rest is ignored as insignificant. As a result we select from the total input to our senses only a very small fraction of our perception, and this causes us to believe that we are separate beings, isolated by the boundary of the epidermis from the rest of the world. Now, this is also the mechanism involved in not noticing that black and white go together, and in not noticing that every inside has an outside. The inside, what goes on inside your skin, is inseparable from what goes on outside your skin. For example, in the science of ecology one learns that a human being is not an organism in an environment, but is an organism/environment, that is to say, a unified field of behavior. If you describe carefully the behavior of any organism you cannot do so without at the same time describing the behavior of the environment, and by that you know that what you are describing is the behavior of a unified field. However, you must be very careful indeed not to fall into old Newtonian assumptions about the billiard ball nature of the universe. The organism is not the puppet of the environment being pushed around by it, nor on the other hand is the environment the puppet of the organism being pushed around by the organism. The

relationship between them is, to use John Dewey's word, "transactional," a transaction being a situation like buying and selling in which there is no buying unless somebody sells, and no selling unless somebody buys. So that is the fundamental relationship between ourselves and the world. Such people as B. F. Skinner, who did not update their philosophy and interpreted life in terms of Newtonian mechanics, saw the organism as something determined by the total environment. They did not see, in a more modern way of talking about it, that this is simply describing a unified field of behavior, which is nothing more than what any mystic ever said. In the modern, academic, and scientific environment, mysticism is a dirty word, but if a mystic is one who is sensibly or even sensuously aware of his inseparability as an individual from the total existing universe, he is simply a person who has become sensible—aware through his senses—of the way ecologists see the world. When I am in academic circles I do not talk about mystical experiences, instead I talk about ecological awareness, yet this is simply two ways of describing the same thing.

The next aspect of our metaphysical introduction must be about games. I think there are really four questions that all philosophers have discussed from the beginning of recorded time. The first is: Who started it? The second is: Are we going to make it? The third is: Where are we going to put it? And the fourth is: Who is going to clean up? When you think these questions over it poses a fifth question: Is it serious? And that is the one I want to discuss. Is existence serious, as when you say to the doctor after he has looked at your X-ray, "Is it serious?" Now, what does that mean? It means, "Am I in danger of not continuing to survive?" However, the real question is "Ought I to continue to survive?" In other words, "Must I survive?" If life is serious, then of course I must survive. If it is not serious, it really does not matter whether I do or not. Now, in Western culture it is practically a basic assumption that existence is serious, and this is particularly true among people who call themselves existentialists. When they talk about a person who exists authentically they mean that he takes his life seriously and other people's lives seriously. However, the poet and essayist, G. K. Chesterton, once

observed that "angels fly because they take themselves lightly." And if I may venture into mythology, if the angels take themselves lightly, how much more would the lord of the angels? But of course we have been brought up in a mythological context where the Lord God definitely does take Himself seriously and is indeed, *the* serious person. So, when we go into church, laughter is discouraged in the same way as it is discouraged in court. This is a serious matter and everybody has to have the right expression on their faces because this is the great authority figure. This is Grandpa, and we do not realize that he has a twinkle in his eye. So the basis of it all is this: If we say, "You must survive" or "I must survive," and "Life is earnest and I have got to go on," then your life is a drag and not a game.

Now it is my contention and my basic metaphysical axiom that existence—the physical universe—is basically playful. There is no necessity for it whatsoever. It is not going anywhere; that is to say, it does not have some destination at which it ought to arrive. It is best understood by analogy with music because music as an art form is essentially playful. We say, "You play the piano." You do not work the piano. Why? For instance, music differs from travel because when you travel you are trying to get somewhere and, being a very compulsive and purposive culture, we are busy going everywhere faster and faster in an attempt to eliminate the distance between places. With modern jet travel you can arrive anywhere almost instantaneously, and what happens as a result is that the two ends of your journey become the same place. So you eliminate the distance and you eliminate the journey, and you forget that the fun of the journey is to *travel,* not to obliterate travel. In music, though, one does not make the end of a composition the point of the composition. If that were so, the best conductors would be those who played fastest, and there would be composers who wrote only finales. People would go to a concert just to hear one crashing chord because that is the end. The same is true of dancing because the point of dancing is to *dance.*

However, we do not understand this because it is not something brought by our education into our everyday conduct. We have a system

of schooling which gives a completely different impression. Everything we do is graded, and we put the child into the corridor at one end of this grade system, with a kind of "Come on, kitty-kitty-kitty." So you go to kindergarten, and that is a great thing, because when you finish that you will get into first grade; then "Come on!" First grade leads to second grade, and so on. When you get out of grade school you go on to high school, and the whole thing is "revving up," and coming closer. Then you go on to college, and then by Jove, you get into graduate school, and when you are through with graduate school you go out to join the world. You get into some racket in which you are selling insurance and everyone has their quota to make, and you are going to make it. All the time that great thing is coming and coming, and it is the success you are working toward. Then one day when you wake up, and you are forty years old, you say, "My God, I have arrived! I am there." However, you do not feel very different from what you always felt, and there is a slight let-down because you feel there was a hoax. Of course there was a hoax, a dreadful hoax, because they made you miss everything by expectation. People live to retire and they put those savings away, but then when they are sixty-five they do not have any energy left to enjoy it, and they end up in a senior citizens' community.

We have simply cheated ourselves the whole way down the line. We thought of life by analogy—as a journey or a pilgrimage—which had a serious purpose at the end. The thing was to get to that end, success, or whatever it is, or maybe Heaven after you are dead, but we missed the point along the whole way. It was a musical thing, and you were supposed to sing or dance while the music was being played. Instead you had to do "that thing" and you did not let it happen. So this is why the human being sometimes becomes an organism for self-frustration. Alfred Korzybski called man a "time binder," which means that he is the animal peculiarly aware of the time sequence. As a result of this he is able to do some very remarkable things. He can predict: he studies what has happened in the past, and he says the chances are so-and-so of that happening again. Well, to be able to predict is very useful because that has survival value, but at the same time it creates anxiety. You pay for

the increased survivability gained in prediction by knowing that in the end you will not succeed. Everyone is going to fall apart by one way or another; it might happen tomorrow, it might happen fifty years from now, but it all comes apart in the end. So people get worried about that and they become anxious, and what they gain on the roundabout, they lose on the swings.

On the other hand, if you see that existence is musical in nature, you will understand my basic metaphysical assumption that life is not serious. It is a play of all kinds of patterns and we can look upon different creatures as we look at different games. There is the human game, the tree game, the grass game, et cetera. All down the line there are all these different things doing their dance. If you were in a flying saucer from some other planet, and you came and tried to make out what kind of organism was living on this world from about ten-thousand feet late at night, you would see on the surface of the earth great ganglia with tentacles going out all over the place. Early in the morning you would see little blobs of luminous particles going into the middle of them. Then in the late afternoon or early evening it would spit them all out again. You might say, "Well, this thing breathes, and it does it in a special rhythm. It goes in-and-out, in-and-out, and in-and-out, once every twenty-four hours. Then it rests a day and does not spit so much, it just spits in a different way. There is a kind of irregularity, and then it starts spitting the same way all over again." They would say, "Well, that is very interesting, but that is just the kind of thing we have. It is something that goes this way, and then goes that way."

Now, although it has distinctive patterns, existence is something that is spontaneous. The Chinese word for nature is *tzu-jan*, that which happens of itself. Your hair grows by itself, your heart beats by itself, and your breath happens pretty much by itself. Your glands secrete the essences by themselves and you do not have voluntary control over these things, and so we say they happen spontaneously. So, when you go to bed and *try* to go to sleep you interfere with the spontaneous process of going to sleep. If you try to breathe real hard you will find you get balled-up in your breathing. So if you are to be human, you just have to

trust yourself to go to sleep, to digest your food, and to have bowel movements. Of course if something goes seriously wrong and you need a surgeon that is another matter, but by and large the healthy human being does not from the start of life need surgical interference. One lets it happen by itself, and so with the whole picture that is fundamental to it. You have to let go and let it happen, because if you don't then you are constantly going to be trying to do what happens easily only if you do *not* try. When you think a bit about what people really want to do with their time, and you ask what they do when they are not being pushed around or somebody is telling them what to do, you find they like to make rhythms. They listen to music and they dance or they sing, or perhaps they do something of a rhythmic nature like playing cards, bowling, or raising their elbows. Given the chance, everybody wants to spend their time *swinging.*

Seeing Through the net

Chapter Eight

We are living in an age when there has been an enormous proliferation of techniques for subjecting every kind of natural process outside the human skin, and now increasingly inside the human skin, to some form of rational control. As we appear to succeed in controlling nature it also becomes apparent that we are failing, and the process has become of such a high degree of complexity that we begin to feel that we are standing in our own way. Everybody complains that the state of affairs in the modern world is so complicated that nobody can understand it, and yet nobody really knows what to do. For example, if you want to run a small business there are enormous legal requirements, and you need so much help to do the paperwork that you can hardly run the business at all. You may be trying to run a hospital, but you have to spend so much time keeping records and writing things down on paper that you have no time to practice medicine. You may be trying to run a university but the requirements, the recording, and the endless red tape of the registrar's office is such that the actual work of research and teaching is seriously hampered.

In this society individuals increasingly feel themselves obstructed by their own cautiousness. Now, I am a philosopher who has for many years been interested in the mutual fructification of Eastern cultures and Western cultures. For years I have been studying Oriental ideas, not in the spirit of saying to the West, "You ought to be converted to Oriental ideas," but rather in the spirit of saying, "You do not understand the

basic assumptions of your own culture if your own culture is the only culture you know." Everybody operates on certain basic assumptions, but very few people know what those assumptions are. You may often encounter the sort of character who is typical of an American businessman, and he says, "Well, I am a practical businessman. I believe in producing results and getting things done, and all this high-falutin' logic and nonsense is of no concern to me." Now I know that the basic practical assumptions, the metaphysics of that man, can be defined as a school of philosophy known as pragmatism. However, it is a bad example of pragmatism because he has never thought it through. It is very difficult to get down exactly to your basic assumptions and ask, "What do you mean by consistency? What do you mean by rationality? What do you mean by the good life?" The only way of finding out what you mean by these things is by contrasting the way you look at something to the way it is looked at in another culture.

Therefore, to gain perspective we have to find cultures which are in some ways as sophisticated as our own but at the same time as different from our own as possible. For this purpose I always thought that the Chinese culture is optimal, as well as the culture of India, and that by studying the ideas of these people and understanding their life goals we could become more aware of our own. In keeping with the old principle of triangulation, you cannot establish the position of a particular object unless you observe it from two particularly different points of view, and thereby calculate its actual distance from you. So, by looking at what we are pleased to call the reality of the physical world from the basic standpoints of different cultures, I think we are in a better position to know where we are than if we only have one single line of sight. Therefore, this has been my interest and my background, and arising out of this there has come a further question which I would call "the problems of human ecology." How is man to be best related to his environment, especially in circumstances where we are in possession of an extremely powerful technology and have the capacity to change our environment far more than anyone else has ever been able to do so? Are we going to end up best related to it not by civilizing the world but by

urbanizing it? In other words, are we going to foul our own nest as a result of technology?

Now all of this really comes down to the basic question: "What are you going to do if you are God?" If, in other words, you find yourself in charge of the world through technological powers, instead of leaving evolution to what we used to call in the nineteenth century "the blind processes of nature," what are you going to do? We are not going to leave evolution to the blind forces of nature anymore. We are going to direct it ourselves, because we are developing increasing control over genetic systems, over the nervous system, and over all kinds of systems. A simple question then arises: "What do you want to do with it?" Most people do not know, and they have never even seriously confronted the question of what they want. If you ask a group of students to sit down and write a solid paper of twenty pages on "Your Idea of Heaven," or what they would really like to see if they could make it happen, it starts them really thinking and they soon realize that a lot of the things they thought they would want are not really what they want at all. Supposing, just for the sake of illustration, you had the power to dream every night any dream you wanted to dream. Now you could, of course, arrange for one night of dreams to be seventy-five years of subjective time, or any number of years of subjective time. What would you do? Naturally you would start out by fulfilling every wish. At first you would have the most magnificent food and sexual partners and everything you could possibly imagine in that direction. Then, when you got tired of that after several nights, you would switch a bit and you would soon find yourself involved in adventures, like that of a fairy-tale princess being saved from a dragon by a gallant knight, or you might be the gallant knight who is doing the rescuing. You would figure out fantastic mathematical conceptions, contemplate great works of art, and create all sorts of magnificent things. Finally you would say, "Now, tonight what we are going to do is we are going to forget this dream is a dream, and we are going to be really shocked." When you awoke from that one you would say, "Now that was an adventure!" Thereafter you would think of more and more ways to get involved while letting go of control, knowing that

you would always come back to "center" in the end. However, while you were involved in the dream you would not know you were actually going to come back to center, and eventually you would be dreaming a dream in which you found yourselves sitting around in this room listening to me talking. You would be completely involved with the particular life problems which you have, and maybe that is what you are doing right now.

However, there is a difficulty in this which is the issue of control. It comes down to the question: "Are you wise enough to play at being God?" In order to understand what that question means we have to go back again to metaphysical assumptions underlying our common sense. Whether you are a Jew, a Christian, an agnostic, or an atheist you are not uninfluenced by the whole tradition of Western culture. The models of the universe which our culture has employed influence our very language, and the structure of our thought, indeed the very constitution of our logic, is seen in the architecture of today's computers. The Western model of the universe is political, being derived from engineering or architecture. All Western thought is based on the idea that the universe is a construct, and even when we get rid of the idea of the constructor or the personal god we continue to think of the world in terms of it being a machine. We see the world in terms of Newtonian mechanics, and later in terms of what we call quantum mechanics, although I find it rather difficult to understand how quantum theory is in any sense "mechanics." It is much more like "organics," which is a different concept. However that may be, the Newtonian concept has percolated into the very roots of our common sense. Instead of seeing the world as something alive, the world is viewed as a construct, an artifact, and therefore one must come to understand the operations of a machine by analysis of its parts. By separating them into their original bits we have "bitted" the cosmos, and we see everything going on in terms of bits of information. We have found that this is an extremely fruitful enterprise in that it enables us to think we control what is happening. After all, the whole of Western technology is the result of "bitting." If you want to eat a chicken you cannot eat the whole chicken

at once. You have to bite it and reduce it to bits. You do not get a cut-up fryer out of an egg because it does not come that way.

Now, we do not know the origins of all this, and it probably goes back many thousands of years. The way we develop the art of thinking, which is essentially calculus, is that the universe as it comes in nature (the physical universe) is something like a Rorschach blot. It is all wiggles. We who live in cities are not really used to this because we build everything in straight lines, rectangles, and so on. Wherever you see this sort of hard, geometric shape you know human beings have been around because they are always trying to straighten things out. However, nature itself includes clouds, water, the outlines of continents, mountains, and biological existences, and all of them wiggle. Wiggly things are to human consciousness a little bit of a nuisance because we always want to figure them out. Therefore, it is as if some ancient fisherman one day held up his net and looked at the world through it, and then he said: "My, just think of that. There I can see the view, and the peak of that mountain is one-two-three-four-five-six holes across, and the base is one-two-three-four-five holes down. I've got its number." So the lines of celestial and terrestrial latitude and longitude and indeed the whole idea of a matrix—of looking at things through graph paper printed on cellophane—is basic to the idea of measurement. This is the way we calculate and break down the wiggliness of the world into comprehensible, countable, geometrical units, thereby figuring it and constructing it in those terms. This procedure is so successful up to a point that we can of course come to imagine that the physical world really is discreet, discontinuous, full of points, and is in fact a mechanism. However, I just want to suggest the possibility that this way of seeing the world may be the prejudice of a certain personality type.

In the history of philosophy, poetry, and art we find the interaction of two personality types which I call "prickles" and "goo." The prickly people are advocates of intellectual porcupinism. They want a rigor with very precise statistics and they have a certain clipped attitude in their voices. This is very well known in academic circles where certain people always tend to be a little edgy like that. They accuse other people of

being disgustingly vague, miasmic, and mystical. However, the vague, miasmic, and mystical people accuse the prickly people of being mere skeletons with no flesh on their bones. They say, "You just rattle. You are not really a human being. You know the words but you don't know the music." So therefore, if you belong to the prickly type, you hope that the ultimate constituent of matter is particles. If you belong to the gooey type you hope it is waves. If you are prickly you are a classicist; and if you are gooey you are a romanticist. Going back into medieval philosophy, if you are prickly you are a nominalist; if you are gooey you are a realist, and so it goes. Yet we know very well that this natural universe is neither prickles nor goo exclusively. It is gooey prickles and prickly goo, depending on your level of magnification. If you have focused your magnification on something so that the focus is clear, then you have a prickly point of view, allowing you to see structure and shape clearly outlined and sharply defined. If you turn the dial a little out of focus, then you have goo. We are always playing with the two views because it embodies the question of "Is the world basically stuff, like matter, or is it basically structure?" Of course, we find out today that in science we no longer seriously consider the idea of matter being some sort of stuff anymore.

Suppose you were to describe "stuff." What terms would you use to describe it? You always have to describe it in terms of structure, in terms of something which is countable and can be designated as a pattern. No matter where we look we never get to any basic stuff and it seems to me that this way of thinking is based on a form of consciousness which we could best call "scanning." The very capacity to divide experiences into bits is somehow related to a physical facility which corresponds to the sweeping of a radar beam, or a spotlight, over the environment. The advantage of the spotlight is it gives you intensely concentrated light on restricted areas. A floodlight, by comparison, has less intensity. However, if this room were in total darkness, and you used the spotlight with a very thin beam and you scanned the room with it, you would have to retain in memory all the areas over which it passed and then, by an additive process, you would make out the contours of

the room. Now it seems to me that this is something in which civilized man, both in the East and in the West, has specialized. This is a method of paying attention to things which we call "noticing," and therefore it is highly selective. It picks out features in the environment which we say are noteworthy and which we therefore register with a notation, be it the notation of words, the notation of numbers, or a notation such as algebra or music. We notice those things, and only those things, for which we have notation. Very often a child will point at something and say to its parents, "What is that?" They are not clear what the child is pointing to because the child has pointed to something which we do not consider to be a "thing." The child has pointed to an area of funny pattern on a dirty wall, and has noticed a figure on it. However, the child does not have a word for it and asks, "What is that?" The adult says, "Oh, that's just a mess," because to us it does not count as a thing. Through this you come to ask the question: "What do you mean by a *thing*?" Now, it is very fascinating to ask children this question because we find that they do not know because it is one of the unexamined suppositions of the culture. "What do you mean by an event?" Well, everybody knows what an event is but nobody can say, because a thing is a "think." It is a unit of thought just like an inch is a unit of measurement. So we "thing" the world, which is to say that in order to measure a curve you have to reduce it to a series of points and apply the calculus. So, in exactly the same way, in order to discuss or talk about the universe you have to reduce it to things. But each thing, or "think," is one grasp of the spotlight. We reduce the infinite wiggliness of the world to grasps, or bits, and we are getting back to the idea of biting one's own teeth, of grasping one's own thoughts. So we thereby describe the world in terms of things, just as that fisherman could describe his view by the number of net-holes over and through which the view was showing, and this has been the immensely and apparently successful enterprise of all technological culture, superbly emphasized by ourselves.

However, the problem that arises is very obviously one of over-specialization. Everybody knows this is prevalent in the science of medicine. On the one hand you may have a specialist who really

understands the function of the gallbladder and has studied gallbladders ad infinitum. However, whenever he looks at a human being he sees them in terms of their gallbladder. So, if he operates on the gallbladder, he may do so very knowledgeably since he is well-educated about that particular area of the organism, but he does not foresee the unpredictable effects of this operation in other connected areas. The human being's gallbladder is not a "thing" that can be extracted in the same way that a spark plug can be extracted and replaced with a new one. The system is not the same because there is a fundamental difference between a mechanism and an organism which can be described operationally. A mechanism is assembled; you add this bit to that bit, that bit to this bit. However, an organism grows from within, you do not see little bits coming from all directions to join each other, finally making up a shape. It is more like watching a photographic plate developing. Suddenly the area you are watching seems to organize itself and develop from the relatively simple and gooey to the relatively structured and prickly. So then, if we are trying to control and understand the world through the scanning system of conscious attention which takes in everything a bit at a time, and if that is the only method we rely on, we are going to run into a problem. Everything is going to appear increasingly to be too complicated to manage. For example, let us take the problem facing the electronics industry with catalogs of products that are being produced over the world. Who has read all the catalogs? How do you know if something you are working on is patented or not? Who else has developed a similar product? Has anybody had time to read all the catalogs? Well, of course nobody has because they are just voluminous, and it is exactly the same in almost any other field. There is an information explosion much like the population explosion, and how on earth are you going to scan all that information? Of course, you can get computers to help you in this direction but by Parkinson's Law the sooner you become more efficient in doing this, the more this will stimulate cataloging so that you will have to have more efficient computers still to assimilate all the information. You may get ahead, but only for a short time.

We end up wondering if perhaps there were some other way of understanding things. Let us go back from the spotlight to the floodlight, to the extraordinary capacity of the human nervous system to comprehend situations instantaneously without analysis, that is to say without verbal or numerical symbolism of the situation in order to understand it. We rely heavily upon abstract representation, yet we have this curious ability of pattern recognition which the mechanical systems have only in a very primitive way. Computers are able to recognize figures and letters written in almost anyone's handwriting provided their handwriting is a fairly normal grade-school style. However, a computer has a terrible time trying to recognize the letter "A" when it is printed in sanserif, gothic, longhand, or whatever kind of "A" you may actually write. The human recognizes this pattern instantly but the computer is at a disadvantage. It seems to lack a kind of capacity I would call "field organization" because it is terribly punctive and digital, much like a newspaper photograph which, when you look at it under a magnifying glass, is all dots. The problem is that in developing technology we have left out of consideration our strongest suit, which is the organization of the brain itself. We are in a situation where the brain is still not really understood by even the most competent neurologists. It puzzles them because they cannot give a model of the brain in numerical or verbal language. Now, you are *that.* You are this thing which you yourself cannot figure out. But in the same way that I cannot bite my own teeth, the I who is attempting to bite my teeth with my teeth by the sheer complexity of structure is far more evolved than any system that can be imagined. This is, in a way, slightly akin to the "girdle theorem" by which you cannot have a system of logic which defines its own axioms. The axioms of any given system must always be defined in terms of a higher system. However, you are the most complex thing that has yet been encountered in the cosmos, and so you cannot figure you out.

Now let us suppose that we are going to try to do the impossible and become, as it were, completely transparent to ourselves. What happens when we entirely understand the organization or the mechanics of our own brains? Well, you are again back in the situation of God, and when

you are God what are you going to do? If you are God you know what you are going to do: you are going to say to yourself, "Get lost." What you want is a surprise, and when you have figured everything out there will be no more surprises, and then you will be completely bored. But on the other hand, a person who is really functioning completely is a person who trusts his own brains and permits his brain to operate at a more optimal level. In other words, even though he knows how to think things out he makes his best discoveries without thinking. In the processes of creative invention if you have a problem you think it over but you may not find any answer to it because the punctive or digital system of thinking is at the same time too simple and too clumsy to deal with it. The problem is more complex, and there are more variables than can be kept in mind at one time, so you might say, "I will sleep on it." Now this is very similar to research done at the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, or at the Institute of Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, where they pay people to goof off, which is an excellent idea. You have a blackboard on which you fiddle around, and you look out of the window, and your brain eventually hands you the solution to the problem. You recognize it immediately because you have the technical knowledge and so you know that it is a solution. Then naturally you go back and check it and you work it out in the bit-by-bit form of thinking to see how it comes out in those terms. If it does work out, everybody will agree with you and say, "Yes, that is the answer." However, if it does not come out in those terms they will not agree with you because you have not subjected it to the socially acceptable traditional form of analyzing knowledge.

Now, here is the problem. It takes an awfully long time to check these solutions out because it takes even longer to arrive at the solution which you have come to spontaneously by a purely calculated process. Most of the situations in life are such that they do not wait for us to make up our minds, and so an enormous amount of carefully worked-out scientific knowledge becomes trivial. It is all very well and very finely worked out, but it arrives much too late because life comes at you from all sides, from all over everywhere at once.

Now I am not saying this to put down all this marvelous work of calculation which has been brought to immense electronic and technical sophistication. Actually, computer scientists are the first people to understand the limitations of their own kind of knowledge, but they are going to have to tell the politicians about this because politicians do not understand. They think that this kind of knowledge is the answer to everything and yet I think most of us know it is not which, I repeat, is not something against technology. When you walk you put your right foot forward, and that is fine, but then you must put your left foot forward. The great technological enterprise has been putting the right foot forward but now you must bring up the left foot, that is to say, to bring up a new respect for the organic type of organization which is incomprehensible to technological thinking but which always underlies it. Of course that by itself does not work because after you bring the left foot up you have again got to bring up the right foot, the analytic perspective. After goo comes prickles, and after prickles comes goo.

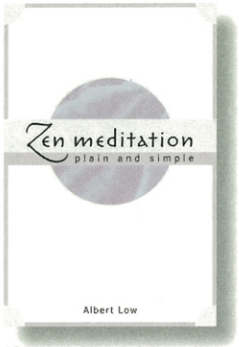
I think our danger at the present time is such that we are so heady, so delighted with the results of prickles, that we have to allow a little bit of goo back into the system. What we have to do is to work out a way of making the brain itself more efficient, and this is one thing that civilized education has neglected. Lynn White used to say that the academic world today only values three kinds of intelligence: verbal intelligence, mnemonic intelligence (in other words, remembering), and computational intelligence. He said it entirely neglects kinesthetic intelligence, social intelligence, and at least seven other kinds of intelligence. However, it is the extraordinary capacity of the neural organization to engage in pattern recognition and in instantly solving certain complex problems without knowing how it does it. The trouble is that when you do something in this way, you do not know how to do it, and it is in a certain sense a non-repeatable experiment. In other words, you cannot explain to someone else how to put it together, but you can do it just like you can open and close your hand without any knowledge of physiology. You do it every time. You do not know how you do it, you just do it. We have an enormous potential in this kind of

intelligence now that we know how to do all sorts of things, but to the extent that we are academically minded we will not allow ourselves to follow through because we cannot explain it. For example, there is a way of cooling a blazing furnace that is very simple, but engineers say it is theoretically impossible and so it cannot happen in the same way that bees that cannot fly by the laws of aerodynamics still somehow are able to do it. So, the rather practical issue I come to is this: if technology relies exclusively on linear thinking it is going to destroy the environment. It is going to become too complicated to handle and man is going to be like the dinosaur which had to have a brain in its head and a brain in its rump because it was so big. There is the story of the caveman who kept a dinosaur, and when he went to bed at night he would clump it on the tail with a club, and it would scream at eight o'clock in the morning and wake him up. It seems to me we are getting into that kind of saurian situation with our technology, and if we follow it, it is going to lead us to extinction.

So, are we going to foul things up by insisting on using linear information as the dominant tool of controlling the world? Or can we master all that we have done and still use the linear input and analysis but with a fundamental trust in our power to assimilate multiple inputs, although we really do not know how we do it? My point is that although you cannot find an absolute which you can pin down, there always remains in any human operation the basic central thing which you cannot understand because it is *you,* just as teeth cannot bite themselves. Now, the assumption of Judeo-Christian culture is that man in his nature is sinful, and therefore cannot be trusted. On the other hand, the assumption of ancient Chinese culture is that man in his essential nature is good, and therefore *has* to be trusted. They say to us, "If you cannot trust your own basic nature you cannot really rely on the idea that you are untrustworthy, and therefore you are hopelessly fouled up." Now this position has amazing political consequences. If we come to a different assumption and say, "No, we human beings are fallible, basically selfish, and really fundamentally evil, we therefore need law and order and a control system to put us in order." We thereby project these

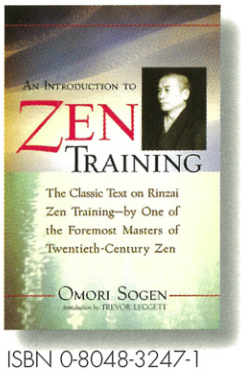
control systems onto the church or the police, or onto somebody who is really ourselves disguised. All of this is very much like the convention of daylight savings time. Everybody could simply get up an hour earlier, but instead of doing that we alter the clock because a clock is a kind of authority, and we say "Well, the clock says it is time for you to get up." The Native Americans laugh at the "palefaces" because they say, "The paleface does not know when he is hungry until he looks at his watch." So in this way we become clock-dominated, and the abstract system takes over from the physical, organic situation. As a result, we have run into a cultural situation where we have confused the symbol with the physical reality, the money with the wealth, the menu with the dinner, and as a result we are starving from eating menus.

Other books of interest from Tuttle Publishing

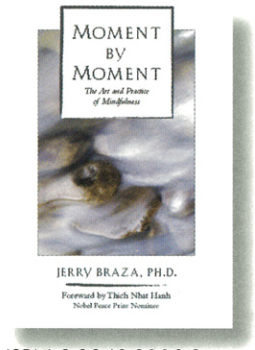


ISBN 0-8048-3211-0

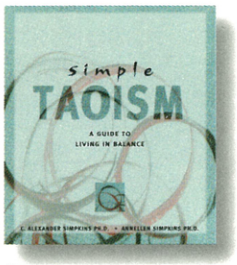
ISBN 0-8048-3185-8


An Introduction to
ZEN
Training
The Classic Text on Rinzai Zen Training—by One of the Foremost Masters of Twentieth-Century Zen
Omori Sogen

ISBN 0-8048-3247-1

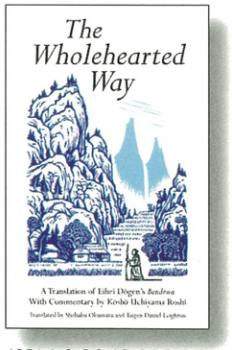


ISBN 0-8048-3113-0

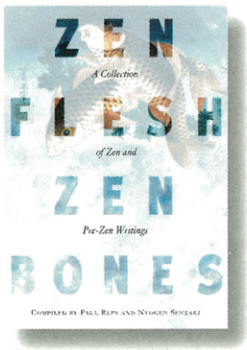


ISBN 0-8048-3173-4

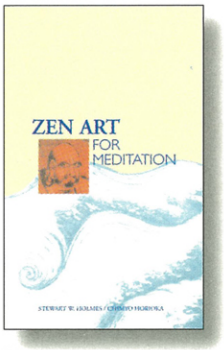
ISBN 0-8048-3174-2



ISBN 0-8048-3105-X



ISBN 0-8048-3186-6



ISBN 0-8048-1255-1